London Charity Beneficiaries, c. 1800-1834: Questions of Agency

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Abstract

In recent decades historians have ‘discovered’ agency in a wide range of geographical and temporal contexts, amongst many different types of actor. This dissertation employs the concept of agency to dissect the dynamics of power in early nineteenth-century London charities. Concurrently, it uses charity to test the potential applications of agency as a historical concept and as a tool for historical analysis.

Through case studies of five different types of charity in early nineteenth-century London, this dissertation explores the varied ways in which plebeians exercised their agency. The case studies engage with current definitions of agency —intentional action, resistance, the defence of rights and customs, exerting control over one’s own life, autonomy, strategy, choice, and voice— and test the boundaries of the concept, proposing different ways in which scholars might characterise agency. This dissertation not only examines how the poor exerted their agency, but also how philanthropists conceptualised the agency of the poor. Although agency had a different set of meanings in the early nineteenth century than it does today, Georgian commentators nevertheless discussed the same phenomena that historians today label as agency. This dissertation considers how philanthropists attempted to mould the agency of their beneficiaries and how the agency of the poor shaped charitable organisations.

For all its prevalence, agency is an under-theorised and problematic concept. There is no consensus about what agency is or how to locate it. As a result, agency is a slippery concept that seems to elude meaning. Historians are often so personally invested in the project of recovering the agency of subalterns that they underestimate the structural constraints acting on agency or they project modern conceptions of agency on to the subjects of their study. This dissertation subjects agency to critical examination that is long overdue. It argues that agency, as an ‘essentially contested’ concept, is a powerful tool for dissecting subtle and diverse dynamics of power. This dissertation proposes and demonstrates ways in which scholars can employ the concept usefully, mitigating its problematic aspects.

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
HA	Hackney Archives
HCPP	House of Commons Parliamentary Papers
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
OBP	Old Bailey Proceedings
RCOG	Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
RCP	Royal College of Physicians
RCS	Royal College of Surgeons
SHL	Senate House Library
WL	Wellcome Library

This dissertation retains the spellings, capitalisation, and punctuation of original documents.

1. Introduction: Agency as a Useful Tool for Historical Analysis

In 1833 Reverend William Stone gave evidence before Chadwick's Poor Law Commission. Stone was Rector of Christ Church in Spitalfields, a London parish that had been hit hard by economic depression. The silk-weaving industry that had once prospered in Spitalfields was in terminal decline, unable to compete against provincial textile manufacturers and machine looms. Unemployment and privation abounded in the parish, as it did in many parts of the metropolis. Stone had been involved in several schemes for relieving distress in the late 1820s and early 1830s. By 1833, however, he had become disenchanted with charities and was convinced that they did more harm than good. He alleged that the poor exploited philanthropists, lying and cheating in pursuit of handouts. Stone claimed that charity was so abundant that working-class people could live entirely off its bounty and never lift a finger to labour for their own upkeep. He argued that overhauling the public system of poor relief was not enough to address dependency. In order for the poor to take charge of their own lives and become self-sufficient, charities funded by private benevolence also had to be reformed or abolished altogether.

To illustrate his claims to the commissioners, Stone told a tale about a silk weaver and his sweetheart. The story was not a factual account of living people, but Stone claimed that it accurately reflected the lives of his poor parishioners.[1] The young couple in the tale do not wait until they are financially secure to get married, for they are confident that charity will make up for their lack of savings. Soon after the wedding, the wife becomes pregnant and lying-in charities assist her through childbirth. Thus begins a lifelong addiction to charity. The parents raise their son entirely on handouts and he continues the pattern in adulthood. At death, he can boast only of the dubious accomplishment that 'he has been *born for nothing*— he has been *nursed for nothing*— he has been *clothed for nothing*— he has been *educated for nothing*— he has been *put out in the world for nothing*— he has

[1] Stone insisted that his tale 'represented an '*ordinary*, and not an *extra*ordinary, instance' of charitable dependency. He claimed that he had encountered cases in real life that were far worse than that of the fictional Spitalfields weaving family. William Stone, *Evidence of the Rev. William Stone, Rector of Spitalfields, and Other Witnesses, as to the Operation of Voluntary Charities* ([London?]: [n. pub.], 1833; repr. 1837), p. 20.

had *medicine and medical attendance for nothing*.[2] In true Malthusian form, his children inherit his dependent habits.[3] They too are '*born, nursed, clothed, fed, educated, established*, and *physicked for nothing*'.[4] Reverend Stone was concerned about the choices that working-class people made, their independence (or lack thereof), their willingness to exert control over their own lives, and their manipulative strategies. Although Stone did not refer to the 'agency' of the poor, historians discuss plebeian agency in just such terms of choice, autonomy, control, and manipulation. This dissertation employs the concept of agency to dissect the dynamics of power in early nineteenth-century charities. It uncovers the ways in which poor Londoners exercised agency in their interactions with charities. Furthermore, the dissertation considers how charities shaped (or attempted to shape) the agency of their beneficiaries and how the agency of the poor affected the nature of charitable organisations. It also reveals the ways in which the upper ranks of society perceived and constructed plebeian agency.

Concurrently, this dissertation uses charity to test the potential applications of agency as a historical concept and as a tool for historical analysis. Agency has been described as a 'buzz word' among historians, as the 'master trope of the New Social History'.[5] In recent decades, historians have 'discovered' agency in a wide range of geographical and temporal contexts, amongst many different types of historical actor —women, enslaved people, prisoners, peasants, and the poor. Influenced by Actor-Network Theory, that suggests that both humans and nonhumans interact in networks, some historians have attributed agency to animals and inanimate objects.[6] Nor has the ascendancy of agency

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[2] The emphasis is in the original text. Ibid., p. 19.

[3] In his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, the political economist Thomas Malthus argued that the population outstripped the economic means of subsistence. He claimed that poor relief increased the number of dependent poor. Malthus believed that dependency persisted through the generations. He claimed that paupers —like the Spitalfields family— married early and thus had far more children than they could support through their own labour. Malthus will be discussed further below. [Thomas Malthus], *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculation of Mr Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (London: J. Johnson, 1798).

[4] Ibid., p. 20.

[5] Caroline W. Bynum, 'Perspectives, Connections & Objects: What's Happening in History Now?', *Dædalus*, 138 (2009), 71-86 (p. 76); Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History*, 37 (2003), 113-24 (p. 113).

[6] See for example Frank Trentmann, 'Materiality in the Future of History: Things, Practices, and Politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), 283-307; Janet Hoskins, 'Agency, Biography and Objects', in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. by Chris Tilley and others (London: SAGE, 2006), pp. 74-84; David Gary Shaw, 'The Torturer's Horse: Agency and Animals in History', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), 146-67; *Animals and Agency: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, ed. by Sarah E. McFarland and Ryan Hediger (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Susan Nance, *Entertaining Elephants: Animal Agency and the Business of the American Circus* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

been confined to history. The concept is prominent in many scholarly fields, such as anthropology, archaeology, and sociology, which are interested in how humans shape societies and environments.

Yet, for all its prevalence, agency is an under-theorised concept. There is no consensus about what agency is or how to locate it. Many scholars use the term without explicitly defining it. As a result, agency can be a slippery concept that seems to elude meaning. Archaeologist David Bruno warns that agency is at risk of becoming 'a grab-bag concept that hovers around the notion that people do things'.[7] Agency is problematic in other respects. Historians' reluctance to define agency obscures the theoretical assumptions that lie beneath their work. Agency is frequently used as if it were an uncontested term, despite the fact that its meanings have evolved over time. Historians may be so personally invested in the project of discovering the agency of subalterns that they underestimate structural constraints on agency or project modern conceptions of agency on to the subjects of their study. This dissertation considers the usefulness of agency. Is it a substantial concept that can deepen our understanding of the past or should historians dispense with such a vague and troublesome concept?

This dissertation argues that, despite its problematic aspects, agency can be an immensely productive concept. While some might consider the multifaceted nature of agency as a disadvantage, it might better be conceived of as an advantage. Agency is an 'essentially contested' concept; there is no agreement about what the 'essence' of agency is.[8] Like other essentially contested concepts, such as power and justice, its meanings are constantly reassessed and revised. The open-endedness of agency enables historians to be creative in their approach to source material and to consider the dynamics of power from multiple angles. Agency allows space for subtle interpretations. Yet, historians have not fully taken advantage of agency's potential. The case studies in this dissertation suggest potential applications of agency in historical analysis, demonstrating multiple ways of usefully employing the concept. More importantly, however, the case studies test the boundaries of the concept, exploring how these boundaries might be expanded and defined.

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[7] David Bruno, review of Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, eds, *Agency in Archaeology* (2000), *Cambridge Archaeology Journal*, 11 (2001), 270-71 (p. 271).
[8] W.B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56 (1955-56), 167-98.

Many studies locate agency only within the binary struggle between subaltern and elite actors. This dissertation recommends a more nuanced interpretation of the subtleties of power. Agency might best be conceived of in Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach's terms as a 'dynamic and relational concept' that is not 'immutable in space and time, but […] a process and mosaic of changing opportunities'.[9] The nature of agency varied drastically across an ever-shifting landscape of choices and constantly changing configurations of power. Agency might be exercised individually or collectively, even in allegiances that crossed class divides. Furthermore, this dissertation reveals that agency does not always manifest itself in the form of resistance. In some cases, poor Londoners exerted their power by complying with the demands of those in authority. This type of agency is particularly apparent within religious contexts, where plebeians who submitted themselves to the will of God and to the will of church leaders might gain material and spiritual advantage. This dissertation also challenges the common assumption that agency must involve rational deliberation and strategy. It demonstrates that plebeian emotions (whether real or simply perceived by others) carried a force of their own. Moreover, this dissertation shows that agency is not the preserve of world-wise adults, but might lie in the unlearned naivety of the child.

Before embarking on the case studies, this dissertation contextualises agency. The introduction charts the evolution of agency, from the early nineteenth century to the present day. It outlines the varied ways in which scholars —particularly historians of poverty, charity, and poor relief— have defined agency and discusses the problems with agency. Furthermore, the introduction reveals how nineteenth-century philanthropists engaged with the notions that historians today equate with agency. The introduction concludes by explaining the sources and methodology of the study, together with an outline of chapter contents.

[9] Anne Montenach and Deborah Simonton, 'Introduction: Gender, Agency and Economy: Shaping the Eighteenth-Century European Town', in *Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830*, ed. by Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-15 (pp. 4-5).

The Rise of Agency as a Historical Concept

The word 'agency' derives from the Latin *agere*, meaning 'to do' or 'to act'.[10] Given that this is a broad and unwieldy definition, agency is most often viewed in narrower terms. During the early nineteenth century, agency usually marked a relationship that was defined by instrumentality. Agency was working *through* something. It was the process of being an agent, of carrying out a plan that had been devised by others. Agency appeared in a variety of contexts. There was the 'divine agency' of the holy spirit operating in human souls. Christians were agents of divine will when they spread the Word or followed biblical teachings. A 'moral agent' was guided by a set of moral principles. The educationalist Andrew Bell developed the monitorial system of instruction whereby pupils taught one another. Bell claimed that, by employing this system, schools could be conducted 'through the agency of the scholars'.[11] An 'agent' was also a representative or employee who worked on behalf of an organisation, an individual, or a business.

During the early nineteenth century, agency did not carry a fixed meaning. It was not a byword for resistance, for choice, and certainly not for autonomy, which seems to contradict the notion of instrumentality. Nevertheless, some nineteenth-century usages of agency anticipated modern-day understandings of the concept. A reviewer in *The Monthly Magazine* argued that friendly societies enabled the poor to take control of their finances, making them 'agents in their own concerns'.[12] Although the reviewer did not suggest that agency and independence were the same thing, his reflexive use of the term conveyed the sense of autonomy. People could represent —be agents of— their own interests. Theologians in the early nineteenth century considered human 'free agency', the capacity to exercise free will despite the existence of an all-knowing and all-powerful God. Not only did discussions of free agency highlight humans' ability to make autonomous choices, they also grappled with the notion of resistance that lies at the heart of many historians' vision of

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[10] 'Agency', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.
[11] Andrew Bell, *Instructions for Conducting a School, through the Agency of the Scholars Themselves: Comprising the Analysis of an Experiment in Education, Made at the Male Asylum, Madras, 1789-1796*, 4th edn (London: John Murray, 1813).
[12] Sarah Lloyd, '"Agents in Their Own Concerns?": Charity and the Economy of Makeshifts in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 100-36 (p. 129); *The Monthly Review*, November 1810, p. 277.

agency. Much ink was spilled seeking to explain why God allows humans to exercise their free agency by disobeying His commands.[13]

From the late nineteenth century, 'agency' was not solely defined as instrumentality, but began to stand in for specific human abilities and actions. For Marx, agency was the human capacity to exert choice and independence. Sketches of the historiography of agency typically begin with Marx's assertion that '[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past'.[14] Marx suggested that people shape the world in which they live, but that this agency is circumscribed by the very world in which they live. Humans are both subjects in and subject to history. Marx's statement reflects the agency/structure binary that pits human action against the societal structures that define its limits. For much of the twentieth century historians in the Marxist tradition focused on structure, showing how social, political, and economic conditions dictated the course of events. However, in 1963 E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* challenged such determinist interpretations of the past.[15] Thompson was innovative in emphasising agency over structure.[16] In the preface he explained his choice of title: '*Making*, because it is a study in an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making'.[17] Thompson argued that the working class was not the inevitable product of historical conditions, but was constructed by its own constituents. Humans had agency to shape their own experiences and social identities like class.

Thompson portrayed himself as a champion of the working class. He 'rescue[d] the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver […] from the enormous

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[13] *The Investigator*, May 1820, pp. 33-50; Edward Dowling, *A Treatise on Free Agency, Maintaining that the Immutability of the Divine Nature Is Perfectly Compatible with the Moral Freedom of the Intellectual World* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1829).
[14] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, in *Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, 50 vols (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975-2004), XI (1979), pp. 102-97 (p. 103).
[15] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).
[16] Kevin Morgan, 'An Everlasting Yea, a No: Agency, Necessity and *The Making of the English Working Class*', *Contemporary British History*, 28 (2014), 457-76 (p. 460).
[17] Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, p. 9.

condescension of posterity'.[18] Historians in the Marxist and 'Great Men' tradition had long denied agency to working-class men, either by dismissing their actions as ineffectual or portraying them as passive beings carried along in the current of economic conditions. Thompson attempted to rectify this, to 'discover' working men's agency and write it into history. Following Thompson's example, historians set out to resurrect the agency of other people whom historians had sidelined. Agency was key in subaltern studies as these histories 'from below' placed common people at the centre of historical narratives. Going far beyond the white male agency of *The Making of the English Working Class*, historians explored how actors of different genders and ethnicities exercised agency.

Histories from below proliferated after Thompson, yet they did not sit easily alongside histories of social control that explored how institutions and authorities constrained behaviour and thought or alongside Foucauldian studies of discourse.[19] Linda Gordon attempted to reconcile agency and social control in *Heroes in Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence*.[20] While acknowledging that social workers imposed middle-class expectations on their clients, she argued that poor families were by no means passive recipients of social-control policies. She insisted that her study contained 'no objects, only subjects'.[21] In a review of the book, Joan Scott suggested that Gordon had missed the point of agency. Scott proposed that, rather than viewing agency as 'an attribute or trait inhering in the will of autonomous individual subjects', historians should consider it a 'discursive effect', a linguistic construct.[22] Scott claimed that human action could not operate outside the parameters of this construct. Gordon countered that describing agency as an 'effect' contradicted the notion of action that lies at the heart of agency.[23] The debate between Scott and Gordon reflected a shift in historiography during the 1980s and 1990s as the cultural and linguistic turns gained ground over social history. Historians began to emphasise discourse over experience. Words and concepts

[18] Ibid., pp. 11-12.
[19] For an example of a social control study see Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[20] Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston 1880-1960* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988).
[21] Ibid., p. 291.
[22] Joan W. Scott, review of Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston 1880-1960*, *Signs*, 15 (1990), 848-52 (p. 851).
[23] Linda Gordon, 'Response to Scott', *Signs*, 15 (1990), 852-53 (p. 853).

acquired an agency of their own; they embodied meaning and defined spheres of action. Although historians examined how people at the centre and on the periphery of power constructed discourse, their focus shifted away from the agency of humans acting in the world.

However, social history made a resurgence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, reviving interest in human agency. Caroline Bynum suggested that this revival was a reaction to the notion 'that analysis of the constituents of culture eclipses individual action and responsibility'.[24] It was once more popular to recover the voices of the disenfranchised and the task of doing so became easier. Historians identified untapped sources that gave insight into the experiences of common people. Large-scale digitisation projects such as *The Old Bailey Online* made these sources more accessible. Tim Hitchcock coined this resurgence at the turn of the millennium as the 'New History from Below'.[25] As Hitchcock explained, practitioners of this new history retained an interest in linguistic constructs, yet they did not claim that social elites held a monopoly on language, as social-control and cultural theorists seemed to suggest. From the early 2000s studies of agency have often demonstrated how non-elites used linguistic and cultural 'scripts' to make demands and assert their views. For example, Caroline Castiglione illustrates how villagers in early modern Italy resisted noble rule by deploying their 'adversarial literacy'.[26]

The concept of agency has ballooned in the twenty-first century as historians have advanced a myriad of definitions to supplement Thompson's portrayal of agency as political resistance. Agency has proven remarkably adaptable, finding a place within each turn of historical fashion. For the material turn, there are histories of people expressing their agency through the manipulation of objects.[27] The spatial turn has produced studies of people exercising agency through their interactions with the physical environment.[28] Jonathan White has claimed that a 'consumption turn' in the study of

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[24] Bynum, p. 76.
[25] Tim Hitchcock, 'A New History from Below', review of Thomas Sokoll, ed., *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837* (2001), *History Workshop Journal*, 57 (2004), 294-98.
[26] Caroline Castiglione, 'Adversarial Literacy: How Peasant Politics Influenced Noble Governing of the Roman Countryside during the Early Modern Period', *American Historical Review*, 109 (2004), 783-804.
[27] See for example Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 9-10; Jane Hamlett and Lesley Hoskins, 'Comfort in Small Things?: Clothing, Control and Agency in County Lunatic Asylums in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), 93-114.
[28] See for example Cynthia Imogen Hammond, *Architects, Angels, Activists and the City of Bath, 1765-1965: Engaging with Women's Spatial Interventions in Buildings and Landscape* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); *Locating*

eighteenth-century British history has given rise to an interpretation of agency as the pursuit of goods.[29] Historians have also ascribed agency to the subjects of these turns; objects and spaces are sometimes said to possess agency.[30] The growth of agency as a concept is due in part to its extraordinary facility for incorporating ideas from different scholarly fields such as anthropology and sociology.

Defining and Locating Agency

The 'doing' of *agere* is not a useful definition of agency for historians. A discussion of agency would have little meaning and agency would be unremarkable if all actions —whether waking, taking a bite of food, or washing one's face— were considered expressions of agency (although, in certain contexts, they may be said to reflect agency). Historians tend to see agency more narrowly. Only acts performed with a certain intention, understanding, self-awareness, or impact are said to embody agency. However, historians rarely state explicitly how they define agency. Instead of doing so, they provide examples of behaviour they consider to reflect agency, trusting that these examples will convey the essence of the concept to readers. This practice of defining through example has made agency a hazy term. Characterisations of agency are manifold and occasionally contradictory. This section outlines the ways in which historians have defined agency through example. This section focuses particularly on agency within histories of poverty, charity, and welfare, although similar strands of definition run throughout the vast field of history.

Most historians are agreed that agency involves intentionality. A person who has agency rationalises his or her actions and acts deliberately in expectation of a result. Paupers who petitioned poor law authorities exercised agency, for they acted with the intention of convincing, cajoling, or

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Agency: Space, Power and Popular Politics, ed. by Fiona Williamson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010); Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces: Venues of Popular Politics in London, 1790- c. 1845* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2010).

[29] Jonathan White, 'A World of Goods?: The "Consumption Turn" and Eighteenth-Century British History', *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), 93-104 (p. 99).

[30] *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, ed. by Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce (London: Routledge, 2010); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

shaming officials into granting relief or addressing a complaint.[31] Female workhouse inmates purposely altered their uniforms to obstruct parish officials' attempts to disgrace them.[32] And yet, there is no shortage of intentional acts. The most commonplace actions are full of purpose; people rise in the morning because they intend to get on with the day's tasks. Even instincts and emotional reactions are not wholly divorced from the realm of conscious deliberation, but have the potential to inform purposeful action.

Since the definition of agency as acting intentionally is unworkably broad, historians have refined agency further. They suggest that agency involves specific types of intentions. However, historians have not applied uniform definitions to distinguish between intentions that reflect agency and intentions that do not. For E.P. Thompson, agency involved political intent, particularly the intent to resist or rebel against state institutions. Later historians argued that the agency of resistance need not involve collective organisation or an overtly political intent, but could be expressed on a smaller scale through 'everyday' acts of rebellion. David Green details how workhouse inmates challenged poor law authorities by destroying parish property, assaulting workhouse staff, and lodging complaints before magistrates.[33] Anthropologist James C. Scott illustrates that a rebellious intent can be manifested in even subtler ways. While maintaining a 'public transcript' of deference, the poor could nonetheless harbour a 'hidden transcript' of resistance that might be expressed through foot-dragging, variations in the tone or wording of speech, and grumbling.[34] Taking Scott's lead, Andy Wood argues that the deference of early modern plebeians masked 'negotiation, confrontation, threat, and brokerage'.[35]

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[31] Thomas Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London, 1800-1834', *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000), 19-46; *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731-1837*, ed. by Thomas Sokoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[32] Anna Clark, 'Wild Workhouse Girls and the Liberal Imperial State in Mid-Nineteenth Century Ireland', *Journal of Social History*, 39 (2005), 389-409 (p. 392).
[33] David R. Green, 'Pauper Protests: Power and Resistance in Early Nineteenth-Century Workhouses', *Social History*, 31 (2006), 137-59.
[34] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
[35] Andy Wood, '"Poore Men Woll Speke One Daye": Plebeian Languages of Deference and Defiance in England, c. 1520-1640', in *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1850*, ed. by Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 67-98 (p. 78).

Closely related to the definition of agency as resistance is the definition of agency as the defence of customs and rights. In his article, 'The Moral Economy of the Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', E.P. Thompson argues that food riots were not a spasmodic reaction to economic stimuli or hunger; rioters acted with rational intent.[36] Rioting sought to uphold the 'moral economy', a set of rights and social obligations that working-class people held dear. Historians have elaborated on Thompson's beginnings, demonstrating how labouring people defended what they perceived as their rights through overt resistance and rhetorical argumentation. Poor parishioners in the nineteenth century demanded burials that met the customary standard of respectability.[37] Far from passive creatures governed by their stomachs, the poor formulated and defended a specific vision of society. Recent studies have shown that a community's understanding of its past ―its social or collective memory― was as key to agency as its conception of moral obligations. Andy Wood shows how non-elites used their historical understanding to challenge hegemonic ideas.[38] Social memory of the past lent shape and weight to plebeian demands in the present.

For some scholars agency is less about rights and more about humans exerting control over their own lives. Agency is the assertion of independence, the prioritisation of one's own needs and desires above those of others. Historians of charity are particularly interested in this definition, as the interests of benefactors and beneficiaries seldom aligned. The 'gift relationship', a concept borrowed from the social sciences, holds that gift-giving is a reciprocal act; both giver and recipient expect something of the other. As poor charity beneficiaries do not have the means to reciprocate charity in kind, benefactors often expect a certain behaviour from beneficiaries in return for the gift. For instance, many charities in early nineteenth-century London expected their beneficiaries to make a formal declaration of thanks.

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[36] E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136. See also E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1991).

[37] Elizabeth Hurren and Steve King, '"Begging for a Burial": Form, Function and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Pauper Burial', *Social History*, 30 (2005), 321-41.

[38] Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Andy Wood, '"Some Banglyng About the Customes": Popular Memory and the Experience of Defeat in a Sussex Village, 1549-1640', *Rural History*, 25 (2015), 1-14; Jelle Haemers, 'Social Memory and Rebellion in Fifteenth-Century Ghent', *Social History*, 36 (2011), 443-63.

During the 1970s and 1980s historians such as Gareth Stedman Jones depicted the gift as a mechanism of social control. They argued that social elites used charity to discipline the poor and force them to conform to middle-class expectations respecting behaviour.[39] In contrast, newer studies claim that the gift exchange did not necessarily restrict plebeian agency. Peter Mandler observes that 'the task of recipients [of charity] was to fit themselves into the positions required by the donors'.[40] This submission, however, was necessary only 'at the moment of transaction'. After this, the poor could 'apply the gift […] to their own needs'.[41] Dorice Williams Elliott argues that Sunday school scholars subverted the gift relationship to their own ends. The founders of the schools in the late eighteenth century hoped that the poor would reciprocate the gift of education with submission and gratitude, yet some beneficiaries instead applied the literacy they acquired at school to politically subversive ends.[42] Even in unequal relationships of power there were opportunities for non-elites to exercise their agency by pursuing their own interests.

Neither Elliott nor Mandler calls their subjects agents, yet scholars have applied agency to similar behaviours to those Elliot and Mandler describe in their studies. Scholarship on the 'economy of makeshifts' illustrates how the poor sought to meet their own priorities by cobbling together a number of economic resources, often against the wishes of philanthropists and other authorities. Sarah Lloyd shows how, in their attempts to 'make shift', charity school children and their parents bent institutional rules. Families pawned their school uniforms rather than scrupulously reserving them for school hours as school governors instructed them to do. Plebeian families may have been 'objects of charity' (recipients of charity), but according to Lloyd this did not prevent them from pursuing their own needs.[43]

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[39] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study of the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 112; Alan Kidd, 'Philanthropy and the "Social History Paradigm"', *Social History*, 21 (1996), 180-92.
[40] Peter Mandler, 'Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis: An Introduction', in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. by Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 1-38 (pp. 1-2).
[41] Ibid.
[42] Doris Williams Elliott, 'The Gift of an Education: Sarah Trimmer's *Œconomy of Charity* and the Sunday School Movement', in *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Linda Zionkowski and Cynthia Klekar (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 107-22.
[43] Lloyd, '"Agents in Their Own Concerns?", pp. 108-10.

Agency has been defined through example as resistance, the defence of rights and customs, independence, and the pursuit of one's own needs, yet it has equally been defined through exclusion. While David Green acknowledges that '[o]pportunism, personal frustration, or a mischievous desire to disrupt the day-to-day workings of the poor law' influenced paupers' behaviour in the workhouse, he dismisses these motivations as contributors to agency, focusing instead on acts of rebellion and the voicing of criticism, which he does consider to reflect agency.[44] For Green, as for many historians, agency involves strategy, a degree of conscious premeditation and planning absent from spur-of-the-moment opportunism or from outbursts of frustration or boredom. Strategy is closely connected to other definitions of agency; it involves intentionality and is key to the economy of makeshifts. Two seminal essay collections, *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840* and *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, reveal how poor people strategically and creatively employed the resources that were accessible to them.[45] Thomas Sokoll uncovers the tactics behind English paupers' letters to parish officials. One such tactic for pressuring authorities to grant relief was to allude to one's potential to become a burden on the parish if help was not forthcoming.[46] David M. Turner illustrates how the disabled poor in the eighteenth century used 'strategies of self-presentation' to obtain poor relief and dispose a criminal court in their favour.[47]

Historians in North America also emphasise strategy, although they do not always apply the label of agency. Billy G. Smith portrays colonial Philadelphia as an 'intensely insecure environment' in which survival for the impoverished depended on strategic use of a variety of resources.[48] Susan Herndon describes how transient women in Rhode Island devised 'ingenious ways' of skirting settlement regulations. They hid from officials who wished to examine them, told pathetic tales to

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[44] Green, 'Pauper Protests', p. 138.
[45] *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock, Peter King, and Pamela Sharpe (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997); *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[46] Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living'; *Essex Pauper Letters*.
[47] David M. Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 145.
[48] Billy G. Smith, *The 'Lower Sort': Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 92. See also *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. by Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

secure sympathetic treatment, and changed their stories and their names to avoid detection.[49] As these examples demonstrate, strategic agency often features an element of resistance. Historians are particularly interested in 'devious' strategies designed to force the hand of those who nominally hold power.

At its most fundamental level, strategy involves choice. People express agency by choosing between tactics and targets.[50] Choice underlies many other definitions of agency. Agency as independence suggests that actors could choose not to follow the 'official' line. Historians often portray choice as a precondition for agency. Robert Cray claims that black people in New York City exerted their choice by avoiding the much-hated almshouses and seeking out-relief in preference.[51] Gary Nash shows how the poor 'practiced their own form of triage', resorting to the most despised forms of charity only once other opportunities had been tried and exhausted.[52] In 1994 Marco van Leeuwen proposed a model of the 'logic of charity' in which choice plays a key role.[53] Elites could select from a range of measures (of which charity was only one) to advance their interests. The poor also had choice. They could accept charity or else 'choose survival strategies other than charity if conditions for its provision were too demanding or the amount that was given was too low'.[54] Van Leeuwen's model suggests that need does not inevitably translate into powerlessness. Given choice —even choice between unappealing options— non-elites could express their agency.

Some scholars, however, suggest that agency need not involve intentionality. The archaeologist David Bruno claims that '[b]y focusing on choice as the intentional decisions of individuals, hegemony and ontology (as preunderstanding) are silenced, despite the fact that it is

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[49] Ruth Wallis Herndon, 'Women of "No Particular Home": Town Leaders and Female Transients in Rhode Island, 1750-1800', in *Women and Freedom in Early America*, ed. by Larry D. Eldridge (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 269-89.
[50] Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living', p. 19; Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 37.
[51] Robert E. Cray, Jr., *Paupers and Poor Relief in New York City and Its Rural Environs, 1700-1830* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Robert E. Cray, Jr., 'White Welfare and Black Strategies: The Dynamics of Race and Poor Relief in Early New York, 1700-1825', *Slavery and Abolition*, 7 (1986), 273-89.
[52] Gary B. Nash, 'Politics and Poverty in Early American History', in *Down and Out in Early America*, ed. by Billy G. Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), pp. 1-37.
[53] Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, 'Logic of Charity: Poor Relief in Preindustrial Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 24 (1994), 589-613.
[54] Ibid., p. 608.

precisely because of these that we cannot restrict talk of agency to intentionality'.[55] The question of whether animals have agency complicates the issue of intentionality. David Gary Shaw claims that animals act with purpose, although humans may not understand other species' purposes. Shaw acknowledges that animals are not 'highly rational or self-reflective', yet he argues that they nevertheless possess 'less articulate sorts of agency'. Using the example of a horse and rider, Shaw contends that animals can share in the agency of humans.[56] By claiming that nonhuman entities have agency, Actor-Network Theory does not emphasise intentionality. In *The Pasteurization of France*, Bruno Latour argues that the adoption of Louis Pasteur's ideas was not solely due to this man's agency, but to a network of forces, including both human and nonhuman actors. Microbes shaped the field of bacteriology, for example.[57]

Historians not only differ in what they consider to be agency; they also disagree over where agency is located. In a rare instance of explicit definition, Andy Wood describes agency as 'the ability to exert meaningful control over the circumstances of one's life'.[58] Wood suggests that agency is the potential ―the ability― to act, rather than the process of acting itself. Peter King frames his investigation into the agency of the labouring poor by asking whether 'they felt themselves to have little or no choice, no capacity to act meaningfully to reconfigure their world'.[59] Wood and King characterise agency as an intrinsic possession of a person. For King agency exists additionally on a cognitive level as a perception of one's own power; agency is self-awareness of one's agency. Both scholars connect agency to 'meaningful' effects, but neither states plainly what qualifies as meaningful.

Unlike Wood and King, some historians argue that agency is present only when there is expression. Agency involves the articulation of desires and opinions, whether through the spoken and written word or through physical action. Stephanie Smallwood argues African people aboard the slave

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[55] Bruno, p. 271.
[56] Shaw, pp. 146-67.
[57] Bruno Latour, *Les microbes: Guerre et paix, suivi de Irréductions* (Paris: A.M. Métailié, 1984).
[58] Andy Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity and the Limits of Popular Agency in a Yorkshire Valley c. 1596-1615', *Past & Present*, 193 (2006), 41-72 (p. 43).
[59] Peter King, 'Social Inequality, Identity and the Labouring Poor in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800*, ed. by Henry French and Jonathan Barry (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 60-86 (p. 61).

ships of the Middle Passage expressed their agency primarily through voice. By speaking their native languages, they ensured that the enslavement of their bodies did not wholly define their identity.[60] Yet, while many historians link agency with 'voice', William Pooley maintains that silences can also express agency. For example, in certain contexts silences could be threatening.[61] There are historians who suggest that an attempt to express power constitutes agency, yet others disagree, arguing that an act must produce an impact —or reach a certain magnitude of impact— before it qualifies as an expression of agency. Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker consider that the agency of the poor in the eighteenth century rested in their ability to alter the institutions with which they interacted. By pursuing their own short-term goals, the poor spurred institutions to make 'incremental changes' which, compounded over time, could transform the nature of institutions.[62] Different methods of locating agency reflect a divide among historians. One camp of historians sees agency primarily in terms of causation; agency is a force that changes institutions and influences the course of events. A second camp, however, places much greater emphasis on the internal aspects of agency than on its outward effects. Historians in this camp suggest a historical actor may or may not have an impact on the world; what is important is whether they perceive themselves and their place in the world as powerful.

Some scholars see agency as change, regardless of whether that change was intended or not. It is occasionally argued that too much value is placed on intentionality because unintended consequences and unpredicted results influence the course of events as much (if not more so) than intentional outcomes.[63] The sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that although humans can act with intention, the *un*intended consequences of their actions are as powerful in shaping their world.[64] Hitchcock and Shoemaker, for example, argue that institutional change is proof of plebeian agency,

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[60] Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 125.
[61] William Pooley, 'Silences of the People', in *The Voices of the People: An Online Symposium, The Many-Headed Monster* <https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/silences-of-the-people/>.
[62] Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[63] See for example Richard C. Foltz, 'Does Nature Have Historical Agency?: World History, Environmental History, and How Historians Can Help Save the Planet', *History Teacher,* 37 (2003), 9-28 (p. 23); Linda Nash, 'The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?', *Environmental History,* 10 (2005), 67-69.
[64] Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 49-95.

despite the fact that plebeian intentions and the changes that resulted from their actions were not always in alignment. Escapees from London gaols did not intend to revolutionise the penal system, yet the pressure exerted by their actions nonetheless precipitated this change.[65] Some scholars of animal studies strip intentionality from agency, arguing that agency ―with respect to animals― is simply causing change.[66]

Agency is a concept that does not solely concern historians. Since the time of Aristotle, philosophers have discussed self-determination and intentionality, concepts that lie at the root of agency. 'Philosophy of action' or 'action theory' considers agency in terms of responsibility, free will, and causality.[67] Philosophers of action do not tend to consider an individual's agency vis-à-vis the cultural and historic conditions in which he or she lives, but rather seek to establish which bodily and mental processes are autonomous acts. While historians and philosophers today ask different questions about agency, historians' conceptions of agency align closely with those of anthropologists, archaeologists, and sociologists. Indeed, as has been shown above, historians have borrowed concepts from these fields and used them to discuss agency, notably Actor-Network Theory, the gift exchange, and hidden transcripts of resistance.

Interrogating Agency

Most historians are content to define agency through example and appear to consider agency an unproblematic concept. However, a small number of scholars cast a critical eye on the concept, taking issue with the way in which it is used. Multiple definitions of agency make the concept tricky to pin down. Each scholar characterises and locates agency in a different way, often rendering it difficult for scholars to engage in debate about it. These issues are felt as keenly in other scholarly

[65] Hitchcock and Shoemaker, pp. 325-29.
[66] Erica Fudge, 'A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals', in *Representing Animals*, ed. by Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 3-18. See also Jennifer Adams Martin, 'When Sharks (Don't) Attack: Wild Animal Agency in Historical Narratives', *Environmental History*, 16 (2011), 451-55.
[67] I am obliged to Constantine Sandis for introducing me to philosophy of action. *Philosophy of Action: An Anthology*, ed. by Jonathan Dancy and Constantine Sandis (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015); *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, ed. by Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2010).

fields as in history. Archaeologists Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb ask whether agency is the 'cat's pyjamas or the Emperor's new clothes'.[68] Dobres and Robb allow their metaphors to speak for themselves, but their implication is clear. Scholars may be deluding themselves by embracing agency, for the faddish concept lacks substance and dissolves on close inspection. Dobres and Robb observe that, despite the popularity of agency, there is 'little consensus about what "agency" actually means'.[69] Sociologists and linguistic theorists also point out the slipperiness of agency in their fields.[70]

Scholars tend to use agency without defining it, as if there were general agreement about what the concept means. The danger in not defining agency is that scholars' vision of agency may appear to be uncontested, as *the* fixed and unchanging definition of agency. The theoretical assumptions that underpin agency are often obscured. In spite of the multiple definitions of agency outlined above, depictions of agency frequently reflect only a narrow set of political values and historiographical concerns. E.P. Thompson trained the historical lens on agency. He felt a personal connection to the people about whom he wrote and saw himself as the champion of and spokesman for the working class. Like Thompson, later historians have been personally invested in recovering the agency of subalterns. Tim Hitchcock portrays writing from below as an exercise in empathy.[71] Twenty-first century historians tend to value the control they have over their own lives, their ability to make decisions and affect outcomes, and so they perhaps want the subjects of their study to experience the same. Historians may feel a small sense of triumph when the 'underdogs' of history gain an advantage over repressive policies and institutions.

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[68] Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, 'Agency in Archaeology: Paradigm or Platitude?', in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. by Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-17 (p. 3).
[69] Ibid.
[70] See for example Jessica Ringrose, *Postfeminist Education?: Girls and the Sexual Politics of Schooling* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 60-61; Steven Hitlin and Glen H. Elder, Jr, 'Agency: An Empirical Model of an Abstract Concept', in *Constructing Adulthood: Agency and Subjectivity in Adolescence and Adulthood*, ed. by Ross Macmillan (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007), pp. 33-68 (p. 34); Jennifer Andrus, *Entextualizing Domestic Violence: Language Ideology and Violence against Women in the Anglo-American Hearsay Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 147.
[71] Tim Hitchcock, 'Sources, Empathy and Politics in History from Below', in *The Voices of the People: An Online Symposium*, *The Many-Headed Monster* <https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2015/07/06/sources-empathy-and-politics-in-history-from-below/>.

Empathy is a useful quality for historians to possess, for it encourages them to see the subjects of their study as people who are as complex and creative as themselves.[72] Empathetic historians may consider what they might do if faced with the same circumstances as historical actors encountered; these 'thought experiments' may assist historians to reconstruct the experiences of individuals, especially those who did not leave first-hand accounts. However, empathy can invite anachronism. Historians may be so intent on discovering the agency of subalterns that they ignore evidence of powerlessness and underemphasise the constraints of structure, producing a distorted picture of the past.

Mark Hailwood suggests that historians are splitting into optimistic and pessimistic camps, according to whether they consider plebeian agency to be potent or highly circumscribed.[73] An optimist in the early 2000s, Andy Wood has adopted a more cynical view of agency in recent years. In 2006 he argued that by focusing on negotiation historians fail to acknowledge 'the hugely unequal distribution of power' in early modern society.[74] Hillary Taylor also claims that historians have overstated the power of the poor. She suggests that historians have so single-mindedly pursued 'hidden transcripts' that they have not considered the possibility that outer and inner states of historical subjects might be in alignment. An outward show of deference might reflect an inner sense of powerlessness. Far from highlighting the agency of voice, Taylor focuses on plebeian inarticulacy, describing it as 'a socially imposed and occasionally internalized mark of […] subordination'.[75] Agency is perhaps most exaggerated in histories of enslaved people. Walter Johnson, Jessica Millward, and Rebecca J. Scott argue that by emphasising resistance, empowerment, and choice, historians ignore the foundational inequalities and brutality within slave societies.[76] Andy Wood has

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Mark Hailwood, 'Alehouses, Popular Politics and Plebeian Agency in Early Modern England', in *Locating Agency: Space, Power and Popular Politics*, ed. by Fiona Williamson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), pp. 51-76 (pp. 69-71).
[74] Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity', p. 43. For a similar argument about anachronism within a study of eighteenth-century London see Nicholas Rogers, 'London's Marginal Histories', *Labour/Le Travail*, 60 (2007), 217-34 (pp. 220-21).
[75] Hillary Taylor, '"Branded on the Tongue": Rethinking Plebeian Inarticulacy in Early Modern England', *Radical History Review*, 121 (2015), 91-105 (p. 93).
[76] Johnson, 'On Agency'; Jessica Millward, 'On Agency, Freedom, and the Boundaries of Slavery Studies', *Labour/Le Travail*, 71 (2013), 193-201; Rebecca J. Scott, 'Small-Scale Dynamics of Large-Scale Processes', *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 472-79.

advised historians to present more balanced interpretations of the past. This does not necessarily require denying the agency of non-elites, but considering it within the context of restrictive social structures and tempering it with 'darker, more pessimistic' accounts.[77]

Avoiding anachronism is not simply a question of balancing agency and structure. Historians must also ensure that the paradigm they employ fits the past. Historians may relate so strongly to the subjects of their study that they impose their own views of agency on them. Jonathan White argues that histories of plebeian strategies and the economy of makeshifts reflect a twenty-first century vision of the 'neo-liberal world of goods'. He warns that such studies of agency 'risk making the poor nobody's fools'.[78] Historians often see agency in secular and individualist terms. Phyllis Mack argues that historians who define agency as autonomy are blind to forms of agency in the past that do not fit this definition. According to Mack, there can be agency in relinquishing autonomy, as when Quaker women chose to put their lives in God's hands and to attribute their achievements to Him.[79] Jennifer Clement recommends that historians look beyond resistance and self-assertion for agency. Clement maintains that writers in the early modern period depicted humility —submission and lack of pride— as a position of agency.[80] White, Mack, and Clement argue that if historians are to accurately represent the complexities of agency in the past, they must recognise their difference from (and not just their similarity to) people in the past.

Walter Johnson is likewise concerned about anachronism. However, he contends that historians' paradigms of agency are also problematic in ethical terms, particularly within slavery studies. Johnson claims that histories of the agency of enslaved people are 'saturated with the categories of nineteenth-century liberalism'.[81] According to Johnson, historians define agency narrowly in terms of self-determination and choice, often conflating agency with humanity. By setting these as the parameters of agency, historians deny agency (and humanity) to enslaved people who did

[77] Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity', p. 72.
[78] White, p. 99.
[79] Phyllis Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism', *Signs*, 29 (2003), 149-77. See also Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[80] Jennifer Clement, *Reading Humility in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).
[81] Johnson, 'On Agency', p. 115.

not have significant scope for independent action or resistance. Moreover, by claiming that they 'give the slaves their agency', historians create a dynamic in which it is they ―and not enslaved people― who have the power to impose meaning. Johnson suggests that the term agency might be abandoned. He claims that historians who discard the conceptual baggage of agency will better be able to identify 'human-ness lived ouside the conventions of liberal agency' and explore the ways in which enslaved people themselves conceived of their actions.[82] Many historians aspire to give subalterns agency, yet (consciously or unconsciously) vest them only with an agency that they are personally familiar with and value. Scholars may dismiss evidence of agency that does not match their personal understanding of the concept. By failing to recognise agency that is Other to themselves, historians risk not only producing anachronistic accounts of the past, but doing violence to —and denying agency to— the subjects of their study. Historians' experiences and values may override those of the subjects of their study. Historians who proclaim that they rescue the poor 'from the enormous condescension of posterity' may unwittingly perpetuate that condescension.[83]

Where histories of plebeian agency represent collective action, it is frequently framed in terms of a struggle between rich and poor. Characterisations of agency are often oppositional in nature. Many studies demonstrate how non-elites exercised agency by challenging the values and expectations of their social superiors. However, oppositional models of agency do not accurately convey the nuances of power. The rich/poor binary appears in many histories of charity and welfare, yet neither side was as unified, nor the two necessarily as divided, as is often assumed.

Some scholars argue that agency can be expressed through compliance and collaboration as well as through resistance. Helen Rogers illustrates how juvenile delinquents in the nineteenth century displayed thanks and gratitude to the prison visitors who instructed them. While some scholars might interpret this behaviour as a sign of the youths' submission or as a cover for a 'hidden transcript' of resistance, Rogers argues that the delinquents displayed their agency by 'demonstrat[ing] their own kindliness and capacity to care for others'.[84] To accurately reflect the shifting nature of power and

[82] Ibid.
[83] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 11-12.
[84] Helen Rogers, 'Kindness and Reciprocity: Liberated Prisoners and Christian Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 47 (2014), 721-45.

social relations, some historians describe agency in terms of bargaining and negotiation rather than resistance. Steve Hindle, for example, details how paupers, parish overseers, and magistrates engaged in a 'triangular process of negotiation'.[85] Other historians, such as K.D.M. Snell, suggest that historians should complicate their picture of the poor and not treat working people as a homogeneous and united entity. Snell observes that historians have largely ignored evidence that there was a 'culture of local xenophobia' among the rural poor in the long eighteenth century.[86] Snell claims that historians are unwilling to accept that working people were divided —and, in some cases, openly hostile towards one another— because such an idea does not fit within a historiography (inspired by Thompson) that 'place[s] an overwhelming emphasis on the growth of shared consciousness, upon the ways in which the lower orders came together as a class'.[87] Moreover, historians are reluctant to portray working people, whom they consider the pioneers of modern values, in anything other than a 'politically correct [and] progressive light'.[88] If they are to accurately represent the nuances of agency, historians must be prepared to engage with past circumstances, even with those that make them uncomfortable.

Agency, Charity, and Relief

It is shown above that 'agency' typically meant instrumentality in the early nineteenth century and only later came to stand as a byword for specific types of human actions. Political economists, philosophers, and philanthropists in the early nineteenth century did not conceive of agency as historians today do; however, they were nonetheless interested in intentionality, resistance, choice, and strategy —all definitions of agency, according to historians. Indeed, these concepts were of particular import during the long eighteenth century. The Enlightenment highlighted free will, freedom, and individuality, notions that are bound up with historians' understandings of agency.

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[85] Steve Hindle, *On the Parish?: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c. 1550-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[86] K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 28-80.
[87] Ibid., p. 29.
[88] Ibid., p. 31.

Political economists in the early nineteenth century were concerned with the links between human choices and economic independence. Thomas Malthus argued that human choices contributed to population imbalance. For example, he claimed that paupers who chose to marry young, before they could financially support a family, perpetuated distress. The earlier they married, the more children a couple had and the greater the degree of their dependency. By choosing to relieve want, parish authorities and philanthropists eroded the independent spirit of the poor, further reinforcing pauperism.[89] Malthus was influenced by utilitarianism; he did not assess the merit of choices by examining their morality or the intent behind them, but the consequences they produced. The philosopher Francis Hutcheson argued that '*that Action* is *best*, which accomplishes the *greatest Happiness* for the *greatest Numbers*; and *that, worst*, which, in *like manner*, occasions *Misery*', an argument on which Jeremy Bentham subsequently elaborated.[90] Bentham wrote that 'the production of happiness' was 'the result of human agency'.[91] He used agency instrumentally, in effect saying that people were agents of their own happiness. However, embedded in his argument is the notion that humans can exert a measure of influence over their own lives through the choices that they make.

The notions of political economists and philosophers were not purely theoretical, but had practical applications. Adherents of utilitarianism and Malthusianism believed that their theories could contribute towards the advancement of society, directing legal and social improvements. Philanthropy, too, might capitalise on these ideas. For much of the eighteenth century, the fashion in charity was for ostentatious display and ambitious ventures. The mid-eighteenth century saw the foundation of grand charitable establishments, such as the Foundling Hospital and the Magdalen Hospital, in which ceremony played a central role.[92] Philanthropists were eager to promote their personal interests through benevolent gestures. However, as Donna Andrew shows, they also insisted

[89] Malthus, pp. 83, 85.
[90] The emphasis is in the original text. [Francis Hutcheson], *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in Two Treatises* (London: J. Darby, 1725), p. 164.
[91] Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 2 vols (London: W. Pickering, 1823 [1789]), I, p. 163.
[92] Sarah Lloyd, 'Pleasing Spectacles and Elegant Dinners: Conviviality, Benevolence, and Charity Anniversaries in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), 23-57.

that philanthropy serve the purposes of utility.[93] Concerned that the population of Britain was in decline, mid-century philanthropists saw charity as a means to increase the number of healthy citizens who could contribute towards the nation's economic and military might.

Andrew charts the shifting priorities of philanthropists over the course of the long eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, philanthropists' enthusiasm for increasing the population had been largely supplanted by concerns about the dependency of the poor. Of course, such concerns did not originate in the early nineteenth century. For centuries, lawmakers and philanthropists had discussed idleness and industry. Eighteenth-century charities encouraged their charges to be productive. Foundlings were trained up as servants and sailors and penitent prostitutes were set to work spinning and sewing. Yet, anxiety about dependency was amplified in the early nineteenth century due to a number of factors. Thomas Malthus stoked fear that an unemployed surplus population drained England of its finite economic resources. Periods of economic depression and the pressures of a rising population merely heightened unease about the supply and demand of labour. Charities in the early nineteenth century aimed to foster economic independence among the poor. Many philanthropists turned against the ostentatious institutions that had characterised charity in the mid-eighteenth century, arguing that they coddled the poor and rendered them dependent by removing them from work opportunities and from their families, the impetus to labour for a living. Large residential establishments fell out of favour as philanthropists sought to support working-class people in their own homes. Early nineteenth-century charities emphasised system, aspiring to conduct their activities with a precision and rigour that was almost scientific. To discourage dependency and prevent fraud, many charities subjected the poor to intense scrutiny and distributed aid in carefully measured quantities. Some organisations gave very little material relief and concentrated instead on equipping the poor with the skills, the knowledge, or the attitude that they would need to support themselves.

[93] Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 94, 137, 169, 172.

As Stone's appearance before the Poor Law Commission demonstrates, charity was caught up in debates about the use and abuse of relief in the run-up to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.[94] Ironically, the same early nineteenth-century charities that had been so careful to avoid the dependency cultivating practices of mid-eighteenth century charities faced accusations of encouraging pauperism themselves. Thomas Malthus blamed the poor laws for dependency; he claimed that parish relief enabled the poor to have large families and subsist entirely on the labour of others. The influence of Malthus can clearly be seen in Reverend Stone's tale. The Spitalfields family is entirely unproductive, except with respect to reproduction. They marry young and consequently have many children who grow up to be as idle as their parents. To Stone, private charity and public relief *together* perpetuated pauperism. The Spitalfields family are not exclusive consumers of charity. Along with securing all manner of charitable gifts, they obtain a nurse, bread, coal, and an allowance from the parish. When the son of the weaving couple dies, he is buried at the expense of the parish.[95] Stone claimed that charity was '*reduced to a system*' in his district.[96] He did not mean that charities systematically distributed relief, but that the poor had come to 'calculate' (depend) on charities and systematically manipulated them to maintain themselves in idleness.[97]

Stone's ideas had currency in the early nineteenth century. Like him, many philanthropists and poor law reformers worried that the poor's manipulative agency facilitated their dangerous dependency. Activity and passivity —agency and lack of agency— were intertwined. Several witnesses who appeared before the Poor Law Commission testified to the harmful effects of relief, echoing Stone's claims. Francis Hobler, Chief Clerk to the Lord Mayor, stated: 'A labouring man is no longer now a noun substantive; he is a mere adjective of a parish or of a parcel of charities'.[98] During the 1830s extracts from Stone's evidence were frequently reproduced in print. The compelling vignette of the Spitalfields family was frequently presented as an accurate portrayal of the state of the

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[94] See Anthony Brundage, 'Private Charity and the 1834 Poor Law', in *With Us Always: A History of Private Charity and Public Welfare*, ed. by Donald T. Critchlow and Charles H. Parker (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 99-119.
[95] Stone, pp. 18-20.
[96] The emphasis is in the original text. Ibid., p. 20.
[97] Ibid.
[98] HCPP, Royal Commission of Inquiry into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws, 1834 (44), p. 87a. See also Stone, pp. 54-72.

poor.[99] Stone's tale spawned an imitator, the story of Tom Kedge who was 'a beautiful specimen of eleemosynary bounty'.[100] Inspired perhaps by Stone, a slew of publications appeared in the 1830s, arguing that charities aggravated distress and immorality. [101] In her *Illustrations of Political Economy*, Harriet Martineau argued that relief stopped the poor from making provision for their own needs. Charity placed a 'bounty on improvidence' and a 'premium on population'.[102]

However, the notions of Reverend Stone and Harriet Martineau were not universally embraced. Governors of the Spitalfields charities to which Stone had lent his services, and which he later criticised before the Poor Law Commission, were understandably unhappy with Stone's testimony. One governor argued that Stone's depiction of the poor was 'a species of injustice and detraction' and that the vast majority of poor people were not manipulative schemers, but individuals in genuine and unavoidable distress.[103] Countering Stone's assertion that the tale of the Spitalfields family represented a typical case, he insisted that the story was 'as extraordinary […] as would be found in any of the romances of the day'.[104] Critics also challenged Martineau, arguing that she was mistaken in believing that charity encouraged the multiplication of paupers and insisting that the solutions she proposed (which including abolishing many charities) were cruel and unjust.[105] Against the clamour of Malthusians and utilitarians, there was a scattering of dissenting voices. Some commentators insisted that the poor did not choose to be dependent, but that desperate economic conditions left them with no option but to seek relief or starve. The radical Quaker Elizabeth Heyrick condemned attempts to punish the poor for requesting alms. She maintained that distress and dependency did not develop because of over-generous material relief, but because the rich were

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[99] *The Monthly Review*, August 1833, p. 538; *The Educational Magazine*, May 1835, pp. 281-86.
[100] *The Educational Magazine*, October 1838, pp. 385-89.
[101] *The Metropolitan Magazine*, September 1834, pp. 317-20; James Phillips Kay, *Defects in the Constitution of Dispensaries, with Suggestions for Their Improvement*, 2nd edn (London: James Ridgway, 1834); *Essays on the Principles of Charitable Institutions: Being an Attempt to Ascertain What Are the Plans Best Adapted to Improve the Physical and Moral Condition of the Lower Orders in England* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836). See also Michael Brown, 'Medicine, Reform and the "End" of Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), 1353-88.
[102] Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 9 vols (London: Charles Fox, 1823-34), III (1834), p. 37.
[103] Stone, p. 28.
[104] Ibid., pp. 28-29.
[105] *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, November 1832, pp. 403-12; James P. Huzel, *The Popularization of Malthus in Early Nineteenth-Century England: Martineau, Cobbett and the Pauper Press* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 70-78.

unwilling to fulfill their duty towards the poor, providing them with education and employment.[106] There were also individuals who rejected utilitarianism, arguing that charity ought to be guided by Biblical principles, rather than by cold consequentialist calculations.[107]

Scope and Sources

Much of the existing literature on plebeian agency in the long eighteenth century is concerned with the poor laws.[108] Historians are interested in parish relief because of its enormous presence as a social and cultural institution. Most poor people had some interaction with parish officials during their lives. With their origins in the sixteenth century, the poor laws had acquired great symbolic capital by the early nineteenth century. Moreover, the extensive system of parish relief left a large documentary trail that historians can employ to access plebeian voices and experiences. Charity may appear to be the poor cousin of the poor laws. Although parish relief was far from a cohesive system, charity was yet more fragmentary, as each organisation developed its own aims and regulated its own operations. While many poor people had sustained or recurring encounters with the poor laws, interactions with charities were often more fleeting. However, as Reverend Stone's evidence indicates, there was considerable overlap between representations of plebeian agency within the context of the poor laws and charity. Concerns about dependency and abuse were not confined to philanthropy. Poor people often exercised their agency in similar ways when interacting with charities and the poor law. Many of the plebeian behaviours described in this dissertation might be found within the context of parish relief. Yet, as will be discussed below, philanthropy extended far beyond the poor laws in the sheer variety of its aims and approaches; as a result, agency within private relief did not necessarily mirror agency within public relief.

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[106] [Elizabeth Heyrick], *Protest against the Spirit and Practice of Modern Legislation, as Exhibited in the New Vagrant Act* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1824), p. 29.
[107] S.R. Bosanquet, *The Rights of the Poor and Christian Almsgiving Vindicated; or, The State and Character of the Poor, and the Conduct and Duties of the Rich, Exhibited and Illustrated* (London: James Burns, 1841).
[108] See for example Katrina Honeyman, 'Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914*, ed. by Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 71-96; Green, 'Pauper Protests'; Hurren and King, 'Begging for a Burial'.

This study focuses on the years between 1800 and 1834, although the final chapter on the Mendicity Society extends this boundary to 1838 to explore the intersections between charity and new forms of parish relief, created under the New Poor Law. This time period offers rich material for a study of agency. As has been illustrated above, concerns about plebeian agency went into overdrive in the early nineteenth century and culminated in debates about the New Poor Law in the early 1830s. By focusing on the early nineteenth century, this study addresses an imbalance in the historiography of charity. The early nineteenth century has received little attention from historians of charity.[109] Most scholars have gravitated either towards eighteenth-century charities, attracted perhaps by their grand plans and charismatic philanthropists, or to Victorian ventures.[110] The penny pinching charities of the early nineteenth century seem to lack the allure of the organisations that preceded and followed them. However, it is a mistake to dismiss the early nineteenth century as a sluggish interlude in the history of charity. In 1810 Anthony Highmore published *Pietas Londinensis*, a guide to more than 450 charities in and around London.[111] Twelve years later, he wrote a second guide, *Philanthropia Metropolitana*, introducing sixty charities that had been established since the publication of his earlier volume.[112] Far from stagnating, philanthropy flourished in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. The crowded field of early nineteenth-century charity was marked by experimentation and debate. Although philanthropists generally agreed that distress, dependency, immorality, and ignorance were significant problems, they had very different ideas about how to tackle them. The

[109] Many studies of charities that were founded in the eighteenth century end abruptly in 1800, even when the charities continued to operate in the early nineteenth century. Histories of nineteenth-century charity frequently cast only a cursory glance over early nineteenth-century charities and consider their importance solely as precursors of Victorian organisations. There are, however, a small number of detailed studies on early nineteenth-century London charities, particularly on the Refuge for the Destitute and the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity. See for example Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 142-64; M.J.D. Roberts, 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship: The London Mendicity Society and the Suppression of Begging in England 1818-1869', *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1991), 201-31.

[110] See for example Sarah Lloyd, *Charity and Poverty in England, c. 1680-1820: Wild and Visionary Schemes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Alannah Tomkins, *The Experience of Urban Poverty, 1723-82: Parish, Charity and Credit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in 19th Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[111] A. Highmore, *Pietas Londinensis: The History, Design, and Present State of the Various Public Charities in and near London* (London: Richard Phillips, 1810).

[112] A. Highmore, *Philanthropia Metropolitana: A View of the Charitable Institutions Established in and near London, Chiefly during the Last Twelve Years* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822).

district visiting societies and Mendicity Society both aimed to make the poor self-sufficient and orderly. While the visiting societies aimed to do so through 'friendly' religious instruction, the Mendicity Society employed a much harsher programme based on deterrence and punishment. This study gives shape to a neglected period in the history of charity, illustrating the chaotic origins of ideas that solidified in the Victorian era.

London was a centre of philanthropic activity in the long eighteenth century. As Highmore's guides illustrated, there was a dense concentration of charities in the metropolis. London not only attracted the wealth required to support charities, but its social problems were so extensive that the city was thought to be particularly in need of philanthropic attention. Charity was one means through which London's reputation as a modern and enlightened city could be maintained. Innovative philanthropic approaches were pioneered in London. The capital was a focal point for medical practitioners, so it is no surprise that the first vaccine charities sprung up there. The idea for infant education and district visiting were imported from Scotland, but were elaborated on in London. Many of the charities in early nineteenth-century London were designed specifically to address urban problems. For example, the founders of district visiting societies believed that irreligiosity was particularly serious in the capital, where churches could not cater to the immense population and where pockets of slum districts were thought to be beyond the influence of the rich. The urban environment generated unique manifestations of plebeian agency. Reverend Stone believed that the proliferation of charities in London allowed the poor to systematically abuse relief. Some commentators claimed that London's abundant charitable provision fuelled migration into the city.[113] The case studies illustrate how London's vast charitable marketplace gave plebeians extensive scope for choice. This study takes London, the metropolis and its immediate surrounds, as its focus. However, in some instances, evidence from outside the capital will also be employed to elucidate aspects of plebeian agency.

[113] Reverend Stone alleged that poor people also hunted charity within the city, moving into districts (like Spitalfields) where charitable provision was most extensive. S.R. Bosanquet, pp. 316-17; *Essays on the Principles*, pp. 196-97; Stone, pp. 30-31.

Given the number of charitable organisations in early nineteenth-century London, this study must be selective. This dissertation presents case studies of five different charities: the lying-in charities for assisting expectant mothers through childbirth, the vaccine charities for immunising the poor against smallpox, the infant schools for the moral education of young children, the visiting societies for bringing religion into plebeian homes, and the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, a charity that aimed to eradicate begging in the metropolis. These charities represent a wide range of philanthropic interests, from public health and education to religion and policing. They also engaged with people at different stages of the life course. This dissertation begins with the lying-in charities that brought babies into the world and concludes with the Mendicity Society, an organisation that dealt primarily with adults and the elderly. The selected charities operated in a number of spatial contexts. While some were institutions, others operated within plebeian homes or on the streets. Such a variety of charities offers the opportunity to see agency in a multitude of forms. With the exception of the lying-in charities, the organisations in this dissertation first appeared in the nineteenth century.[114] The charities built on eighteenth-century precedents, yet many of their practices were innovative. The debate that frequently attended the introduction of new charitable practices brought agency into the spotlight, for it often centred on questions of plebeian rights.

Like the vast majority of charities in early nineteenth-century London, the charities in this dissertation were for the 'poor', people who had few economic resources. The dissertation includes in the category of 'poor' those who self-identified as poor through the act of requesting charitable relief and the people whom the charities sought to engage. The poor were not a homogenous entity. There were many gradations of poverty, from the very destitute who struggled for survival up to artisans who hovered on the borders of the middle class. Many charities targeted a specific type of poverty. Most lying-in charities declared that they catered solely to 'respectable' married women, while the earliest infant schools were designed for children residing in the poorest slum districts of the metropolis. However, as will be seen in the case studies, charities' intended beneficiaries and their actual beneficiaries were not necessarily the same.

[114] The Small Pox Hospital was founded in the mid-eighteenth century, but only began operating as a vaccine charity at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Historians frequently associate agency with voice, the articulation of desires and opinions. Scholars have sought out plebeian voices in documents created by poor people, such as begging letters, working-class autobiographies, and pauper letters. However, there are a limited number of accounts of early nineteenth-century charity from the pens of working-class people. Many poor people lacked the time, the material resources, and the literacy to record their lives on paper. How can historians uncover the agency of charity beneficiaries when their voices seldom speak directly from the archives? This study demonstrates that a wide-ranging and creative approach to source material can build a detailed picture of the behaviour and views of the poor. Sources that were produced by middle- and upper-class people show how elites conceived of plebeian agency and can be 'read against the grain' to reveal aspects of plebeian experiences and opinions.

This dissertation is not a quantitative study. Surviving evidence on charity is too fragmentary for statistical analysis. This study aims to illustrate the range of ways in which agency was exercised and represented and to dissect the dynamics of power relations. Close reading is better suited to the task than quantitative methods. Several historians champion a life history approach to agency. They trace individual lives, examining how people exercised their agency in a range of different contexts.[115] Such an approach is not feasible in this study. The fictional Spitalfields family systematically works their way through the charities of London. Yet, the reality was likely far different. Charity was just one resource in the economy of makeshifts, an approach to survival that followed few rules. It is possible to identify an individual who interacted with a single charity, but locating where and when that individual subsequently applied for relief is a daunting task. Tracking individuals from charity to charity is all the more difficult because charities often did not keep detailed records and, even if they did, the records do not necessarily survive. While volumes of parish and criminal records have been digitised, facilitating record linkage, the manuscript archives of charities (the best sources for identifying individual charity beneficiaries) remain largely undigitised.[116] Rather than reconstruct life

[115] Helen Rogers, '"A Very Fair Statement of His Past Life": Transported Convicts, Former Lives and Previous Offences', *Open Library of Humanities*, 1 (2015), <https://olh.openlibhums.org/articles/10.16995/olh.27/>; Helen Johnston, Barry Godfrey, David Cox, and Jo Turner, 'Reconstructing Prison Lives: Criminal Lives in the Digital Age', *Prison Service Journal*, 210 (2013), 4-9.

[116] The *London Lives* and *Founders and Survivors* digitisation projects encourage historians to consider individual life courses. Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Clive Emsley, Sharon Howard, Jamie McLaughlin,

histories, this study scrutinises the micro-politics of charitable institutions, using vignettes of incidents to illustrate the workings of agency. It employs the technique that Helen Rogers describes as 'intimate reading'. The technique engages with '"deep" rather than "big" data' and 'demands the immersive reading practiced by micro-historians in recovering the world and mentality of individuals and communities'.[117]

The study draws on an extensive body of source material. To access plebeian perspectives, historians from below frequently turn to the autobiographies written by poor people.[118] Working-class autobiographies assume a number of different forms. There are testaments of spiritual awakenings and godly lives, entertaining accounts of adventurous exploits, and personal jottings that were never intended for publication. This dissertation employs several autobiographies. Mary Ann Ashford described her experience applying at the British Lying-in Hospital and John James Bezer wrote about his encounter with the Mendicity Society.[119] These autobiographies may present extreme experiences of charity. Both Ashford and Bezer believed that charity officials had wronged them, a circumstance that likely motivated them to write unflatteringly of the charities. Working-class people whose interactions with charity were less traumatic may not have felt that their experiences merited memorialisation. Autobiographies offer wonderful insight into how individuals viewed charity, yet this study has identified only a small number of memoirs that are relevant to the case-study charities. Most evidence of early nineteenth-century charity was not created by charity beneficiaries, but by middle- and upper-class people. Yet, unpromising as they may at first appear, elite-produced sources are often punctuated with references to plebeian experiences and attitudes.

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and others, *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey: London's Central Criminal Court, 1674 to 1913* <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org>; Tim Hitchcock, Robert Shoemaker, Sharon Howard, Jamie McLaughlin, and others, *London Lives, 1690-1800: Crime, Poverty and Social Policy in the Metropolis* <http://www.londonlives.org>; *Founders and Survivors: Australian Life Courses in Historical Context 1803-1920* <http://www.foundersandsurvivors.org>.

[117] Helen Rogers, 'Very Fair Statement'.

[118] See for example *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography*, ed. by John Burnett, David Vincent, and David Mayall, 3 vols (Brighton: Harvester, 1984-89); David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981); *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s*, ed. by John Burnett (London: Allen Lane, 1982); Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[119] Mary Ann Ashford, *Life of a Licensed Victualler's Daughter. Written by Herself* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844), pp. 64-67; *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, pp. 381-83.

Charities' manuscript records can reveal much about how beneficiaries behaved and interacted with charity governors and staff. As they were intended for internal use within organisations, charity minute books frequently record conflicts and rule breaking that do not feature in promotional publications. Manuscript records may reveal the voices of the poor, albeit mediated by the secretaries who kept the books. The patients of lying-in charities routinely presented themselves at board meetings to complain about the treatment they had received. The minute books seldom recorded patients' statements verbatim, yet they nonetheless detail the substance of their allegations and often reflect patients' sense of disappointment or anger. However, even where institutional records do not document interactions between charity officials and beneficiaries, they can give insight into plebeian behaviour. It is easy to overlook the management decisions that comprise the bulk of most charity minutes. Read against the grain, however, these decisions can be revealing. The minute book of the St Mary Newington District Visiting Society notes that the governors obtained a stamp to mark its blankets in 1833. This apparently mundane purchase suggests that poor people were stealing or pawning the blankets that the charity had loaned them and that the governors wished to prevent this by making their ownership clear.[120] However, administrative records vary in their usefulness. While some are meticulously detailed, others provide only the patchiest impression of charity operations. To historians' frustration, records that were kept by charity agents who had closest contact with the poor rarely survive, perhaps because charity governors (or archivists) did not feel that they merited preservation. The delivery books of lying-in charity midwives, the diaries of hospital matrons, and the registers of district visitors from the early nineteenth century have largely been lost. In some cases, little or nothing at all remains of a charity's records. The Mendicity Society investigated thousands of beggars each year and consequently generated immense quantities of paperwork, of which only a single minute book survives.

If few manuscript records survive for a charity, historians can often glean a sense of its operations from its publications. Digital repositories of printed documents, with their keyword-search functions, facilitate the process of trawling through texts, identifying and piecing together scattered

[120] LMA, St Mary Newington District Visiting Society minute book, P92/MRY/257, 7 January 1833.

clues about plebeian agency. Charities in the early nineteenth century relied heavily on print for publicity. Most organisations produced regular reports to inform supporters of their progress and to attract new subscribers. Official publications avoided topics that might compromise charities' reputations; they rarely explicitly acknowledged problems with internal management or troublesome behaviour from beneficiaries. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify points of friction underneath the calm façade of charity reports. Charities used their reports to counter criticism that had been directed at them; historians can deduce the nature of the criticism by examining charities' responses. Annual reports also provide information about the poor. Reflecting their scientific approach to relief, many charities included statistics about their beneficiaries' circumstances and how they were assisted. Occasionally, statistics reveal that the poor did not follow charity governors' instructions. The statistics in Mendicity Society reports, for example, indicate that significant numbers of beggars failed to attend the charity's office as directed or absconded from its work programme. The district visiting societies and Mendicity Society also included case studies of their beneficiaries in their reports, shedding light on a range of individual interactions with the charities. Charity governors carefully curated the content of their official publications to present their organisations in the best light. While philanthropists' priorities framed the statistics and case studies, the reports provide a glimpse of plebeian experiences.

Charities' presence in print extended beyond annual reports. Treatises, medical reports, and manuals are rich resources for a study of agency. These documents generally include much more detail about the day-to-day workings of the charities than annual reports do. The medical men of lying-in and vaccine charities wrote treatises and medical journals. These publications give an impression of how patients (and their families) perceived and responded to medical procedures. Case histories reveal that lying-in outpatients frequently disobeyed medical orders regarding bedrest and diet. Educationalists produced manuals for the management of infant schools. To prepare their readers for the challenges they would face as instructors, the manuals candidly describe the behaviour of both scholars and their parents. Some manual writers included 'anecdotes' to illustrate how individual children responded to infant school education. Manuals also contained poems and songs for use in the

schools. That so many of these exercises are about lateness, truancy, and unkempt appearances suggests that a large number of plebeian families paid little regard to regulations.

Philanthropists used print not simply to communicate with middle- and upper-class readers, but with the poor as well. During the 1790s, the evangelical philanthropist Hannah More pioneered the Cheap Repository, a charitable endeavour that employed cheap tracts to cultivate religiosity and morality among the poor. By the early nineteenth century, philanthropists had fully grasped the potential of print and they distributed vast quantities of tracts to the poor. Some charities issued tracts to address working-class resistance to their charitable efforts. There were tracts promoting vaccination and tracts designed to convince parents to send their children to infant schools. Such publications are propaganda; they represent the views of philanthropists. Yet, they nevertheless give rare insight into the attitudes of the poor towards charity. If the tracts were to be successful in altering their readers' impressions of charity, they had to accurately represent and address plebeian objections.

Lawmakers sought to capitalise on charities' expertise. Parliamentary select committees regularly interviewed charity officials, especially those who proposed novel solutions to social problems. Charity officials who gave evidence were eager to give a positive impression of their organisations and were prone to exaggerating their success. However, faced with examiners' probing questions, charity officials frequently acknowledged and explained issues that they glossed over in their official publications. Select committees often highlighted disjunctions between charity governors' expectations of plebeian conduct and the poor's actual behaviour. The 1833 Vaccine Board inquiry revealed that, for reasons of health and convenience, many plebeian mothers did not attend vaccine charities as frequently as medical men advised.[121]

Charity officials wrote and spoke extensively about their efforts, but they did not exert complete control over the public image of their organisations. The press frequently reported on charities' activities, particularly activities located in public spaces and venues. Of the charities in the dissertation, the Mendicity Society features most prominently in the newspapers. This is a reflection of the charity's public presence. Whereas most of the charities in the study operated primarily within

[121] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, 1833 (753), XVI.149, pp. x, 25, 50, 54.

institutions or homes —largely beyond the gaze of reporters—the Mendicity Society was highly visible, arresting beggars on the streets and taking them to magistrates. Newspaper 'police' columns frequently described Mendicity cases brought up before the summary courts. The voices of poor defendants can be heard, for the reports frequently record the words they spoke in their defence. People who were arrested by the Mendicity Society certainly attempted to portray themselves in a manner that would gain the sympathy of the court. Such strategic self-representation may reflect agency. However, their statements were not necessarily lies concocted to escape punishment. The views that beggars expressed in court can also be found in other contexts where there was not such pressure to perform. Newspaper reports favoured extremes, for shocking and novel tales sold papers. Poor people who were especially pathetic, brazen, or loquacious characters were much more likely to appear in press reports than were individuals who were less remarkable.[122] The press was also far from unbiased. Each publication's political leanings informed how it reported on charities. Nevertheless, by examining a number of different publications —from unstamped radical papers to the Tory *London Gazette*— the study ensures that a range of perspectives are represented.

The official publications of charities typically skirted controversial topics. The press is a useful counterpoint to these publications because it was an outlet for controversy. Charities came under criticism in letters to the editor, in journal articles and reviews, and in pamphlets. Controversy often yields much for a study of agency, for critics frequently argued that charities constrained plebeian action in inappropriate ways and they alluded to the rights of the poor. Anti-vaccinists, for example, argued that the Small Pox Hospital trampled on parental rights by vaccinating infants against mothers' wishes. Many critics claimed that they spoke on behalf of the poor, giving voice to plebeian experiences and opinions that the charities sought to suppress. Historians must approach critical sources with scepticism. Critics had their own agendas and may have manipulated information, exaggerating or even inventing claims to suit their purposes. Nevertheless, criticism

[122] For more on selective reporting of crime see Peter King, 'Making Crime News: Newspapers, Violent Crime and the Selective Reporting of Old Bailey Trials in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/ Crime, History & Societies*, 13 (2009), 91-116.

highlights the tensions between charities and their beneficiaries. By pressuring charities to amend their ways, critics occasionally secured for the poor greater scope to exercise agency.

Outline of Chapters

In his fictional tale, Reverend Stone details how the Spitalfields family secures charity for every eventuality, from birth through to death. This dissertation employs Stone's tale as a framing device, following the progress of the Spitalfields family through the life course. Early on in the tale, the Spitalfields wife —newly married at nineteen years of age— discovers she is pregnant and seeks charitable assistance. The first chapter of this dissertation concerns the lying-in charities that provided medical aid during childbirth. The central argument of the chapter is that agency is not a fixed entity, but one that shifts across landscapes, actors, and circumstances. The first section of the chapter explores the development of inpatient and outpatient lying-in charity in London. The second section turns to choice, showing how expectant mothers' agency was bolstered or constrained by the choices that were available to them. The third section explores charity organisation, demonstrating that patients' ability to express their agency was influenced by charities' system of management. Plebeian women's agency was highly contingent on a number of factors, some of which were beyond their control. Finally, the fourth section of the chapter examines how plebeian families expressed their agency through complaints. Complaints were not simple affairs; they often involved more than one relationship of power and obligation. This section argues that binary models of agency that pit the poor against the rich do not adequately account for the complex networks through which agency flowed.

The second chapter is a case study of the vaccine charities that provided free smallpox vaccinations to the poor. While the previous chapter focuses almost exclusively on how agency was acted out, this chapter (and those that follow) also address elite perceptions of plebeian agency. The first section of the chapter charts the evolution of vaccine charities and introduces their operating model. The second section examines the agency of rumour. Plebeian women actively participated both in the circulation and consumption of information about the safety of vaccination. The medical

men who ran the vaccine charities worried that plebeian women spread rumours that stoked panic and fear, casting vaccination into disrepute. In order to prevent harmful gossip, some medical men were willing to make accommodations for plebeian mothers. There can be agency in emotion and in rational deliberation alike. Not only did medical men consider plebeians to be agents of rumour, they also saw them as agents of infection who were capable of spreading smallpox. The third section of the chapter demonstrates that there was agency in this infectious potential, an agency that medical men attempted (and largely failed) to control.

The fourth section engages with human clinical experimentation and consent. Medical men who conducted experiments were deeply aware of the immunisation choices that were available to plebeian mothers and parents' ability to spread panic and infection. Medical men's perception of plebeian women's agency, combined with the emerging field of medical ethics, gave poor mothers significant scope to make their wishes heard. The final section of the chapter is on the agency of sensation. The physical realities of vaccination at vaccine charities —the blood, pain, and scarring— produced sensations of horror in some plebeian Londoners, compelling them to boycott certain organisations. Medical men labelled such behaviour as unreasonable yet, recognising parents' ability to choose, they nonetheless strove to reduce maternal objections.

The third chapter concerns the infant schools for the moral and religious education of young children. The chapter begins by outlining the introduction of infant schools in London and the goals of the philanthropists who established them. The second section of the chapter explores the relationship between agency and the economy of makeshifts. Plebeian parents exercised their agency by pursuing their own economic priorities, seeking out schools that met their specific needs or else using infant schools 'against the grain'. Parents demanded changes to schools' curriculum, regulations, and discipline. The strength of parental pressure was such that it may have changed the nature of infant education, as many teachers abandoned play in the face of parents' preference for rote learning. The third section turns to examine the agency of children. Although infant school philanthropists attempted to direct pupils' energies into channels that they deemed appropriate, many scholars broke the rules and avoided teachers' controlling oversight. And yet, not all infants were rebels. The chapter reveals that educationalists (experts in infant education) believed that children wielded considerable

power. They claimed that even the youngest children could play an active role in their education and might act as agents of moral reform in their own households. Adults do not hold a monopoly on agency; the naïve and inarticulate child can wield a power of his or her own.

From education in a school environment, the next chapter shifts to a discuss of education at home. The district visiting societies canvassed poor households, seeking to introduce religion therein. This chapter engages with the theme of sight: of things seen, unseen, and imagined. The first section shows how district visiting evolved as a means to counter irreligiosity, class divides, and economic dependency in the metropolis. The second section reveals that many poor Londoners obstructed district visitors' attempts to access their 'true' condition. This obstruction compelled some charities to experiment with new modes of reaching the hearts and minds of the poor. The third section concerns the agency of deception. It illustrates how many plebeians manipulated (or were suspected of manipulating) district visitors, exploiting the weaknesses and 'blind spots' in the visiting system. The final section of the chapter is about the agency of conversion. It is easy to dismiss visitors' reports of successful conversions, yet they may reflect an element of truth. Expressions of religious enthusiasm from the poor did not necessarily conceal 'hidden transcripts' of resistance. Historians must entertain the possibility that there could be agency in compliance, agency in the sense of being an agent in another's plan.

The Society for the Suppression of Mendicity is the subject of the final chapter. This chapter argues that plebeian agency was not solely concerned with securing material advantage. The first section of the chapter shows how the Mendicity Society aimed to reduce begging using a scientific and professional approach. The second section discusses how the charity sought to revolutionise the nature of charitable giving. This was controversial and many beggars expressed their agency by complaining that the charity's approach to relief was cruel and demeaning, an argument with which many almsgivers agreed. The third section reveals that mendicants also objected to the Mendicity Society's work policies. Beggars argued that the charity's rhetoric, which depicted them as idle layabouts who despised honest labour, was untrue and that the charity's work programme and crackdown on street hawking and entertainment constituted illegal repression of legitimate economic activity. The concluding section reveals that poor Londoners condemned the society's policing efforts

as unduly harsh. Debate on these three issues —charity, industry, and police— tapped into and gained strength from a broader political discussion about the rights and freedoms of Englishmen and the social obligations between rich and poor.

2. Lying-in Charities

> [S]he obtains a ticket either for '*the Lying-in Hospital*', or for '*the Royal Maternity Society*'. By the former of these charities she is provided with gratuitous board, lodging, medical attendance, churching, registry of her child's baptism, &c. &c. By the latter she is accommodated with the gratuitous services of a midwife to deliver her at her own home.[1]

On discovering that she is with child, the young wife in Reverend Stone's above-quoted tale considers her options. She could seek admission into one of London's grandiose lying-in hospitals and give birth in a ward well stocked with food and linen. Alternatively, she may prefer to remain in familiar surrounds. For a midwife to attend her at home, she must apply at a specialist outpatient lying-in charity, a general dispensary, or the outdoor department of a lying-in hospital. Lying-in charities, a category that included both inpatient and outpatient facilities, were popular among plebeian families in early nineteenth-century London. Each year, hundreds of babies were born in London hospitals and thousands more were brought into the world by charity midwives at home.[2] The Royal Maternity Charity, the oldest and largest outpatient lying-in charity, alone delivered between four and five thousand women annually.[3]

Historians of childbirth typically claim that the agency of lying-in patients rested in their ability to exercise control over their own bodies and to determine the conditions under which they gave birth.[4] Many scholars argue that plebeian women lacked agency in hospital, for they were unable to oppose the demands of medical men. By contrast, women who laboured at home were empowered. This chapter argues that agency is a much more complex and unstable force than such an interpretation suggests. Agency might best be conceived of in Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach's terms as 'a dynamic and relational concept' that is not 'immutable in space and time, but

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[1] The emphasis is in the original text. William Stone, *Evidence of the Rev. William Stone, Rector of Spitalfields, and Other Witnesses, as to the Operation of Voluntary Charities* ([London?]: [n. pub.], 1833; repr. 1837), p. 14.
[2] Augustus Bozzi Granville, *A Report of the Practice of Midwifery, at the Westminster General Dispensary, during 1818* (London: Burgess and Hill, 1819), p. 16.
[3] *Account of the Lying-in Charity for Delivering Poor Married Women at Their Own Habitations* (London: S. Gosnell, 1804), p. 7; A. Highmore, *Pietas Londinensis: The History, Design, and Present State of the Various Public Charities in and near London* (London: Richard Phillips, 1810), p. 384.
[4] Jo Murphy-Lawless, *Reading Birth and Death: A History of Obstetric Thinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 26-27.

[…] a process and mosaic of changing opportunities'.[5] Agency moved between spaces and actors, varying in its character and strength.

Many histories of childbirth suggest that plebeian women had little choice. Margaret Connor Versluysen portrays poor women in eighteenth-century London as a 'relatively passive clientele' compelled by poverty to enter lying-in hospitals and submit to their procedures.[6] Pam Lieske describes how medical men subjected indigent mothers to demeaning physical examinations. She claims women's poverty meant that they were 'forced to accept these arrangements out of necessity'.[7] Feminist historians like Versluysen and Lieske focus their attention primarily on the lying-in hospitals. They overlook the outpatient lying-in charities, despite the fact that domiciliary charities vastly outstripped the hospitals in terms of patient numbers by the late eighteenth century. When historians do examine outpatient charities, they often focus on a single organisation.[8] By ignoring outpatient charities or examining them in isolation, historians miss the opportunity to explore how the 'mixed economy' or 'constellation' of charitable maternity care affected how plebeian women exercised choice.[9]

The first section of this chapter explores the development of lying-in charities, illustrating how philanthropists aimed to give poor women options. The second section explores how plebeian women navigated choices. The 'mosaic of changing opportunities' was not the same for every woman, for it varied according to her social connections, place of residence, and moral status.[10] Opportunities could be fleeting. While some women found that structural constraints prevented the

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[5] Anne Montenach and Deborah Simonton, 'Introduction: Gender, Agency and Economy: Shaping the Eighteenth-Century European Town', in *Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830*, ed. by Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-15 (pp. 4-5).
[6] Margaret Connor Versluysen, 'Midwives, Medical Men and "Poor Women Labouring of Child": Lying-in Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century London', in *Women, Health and Reproduction*, ed. by Helen Roberts (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 18-49 (pp. 32-33). See also Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[7] Pam Lieske, 'William Smellie's Use of Obstetrical Machines and the Poor', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 29 (2000), 65-86 (p. 77).
[8] See for example Stanley A. Seligman, 'The Royal Maternity Charity: The First Hundred Years', *Medical History*, 24 (1980), 403-18; Bronwyn Croxson, 'The Foundation and Evolution of the Middlesex Hospital's Lying-in Service, 1745-86', *Social History of Medicine*, 14 (2001), 27-57.
[9] Steven King, 'Poverty, Medicine, and the Workhouse in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: An Afterword', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. by Jonathan Reinarz and Leonard Schwarz (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), pp. 228-51 (p. 235).
[10] Montenach and Simonton, pp. 4-5.

exercise of their choice, others capitalised on the powers that their pregnancies temporarily gave them and circumvented regulations that sought to restrict their options. Paradoxically, the semblance of helplessness could impart a woman with a certain power, allowing her to obtain relief to which she was not entitled. A woman might also apply her knowledge of her own pregnant body to secure care that satisfied her own interests.

Feminist historians may have shown more interest in lying-in hospitals than outpatient charities because institutional settings allow them to explore how Foucauldian surveillance and spatial engineering constrained patients' ability to think and act for themselves. Feminist histories portray the hospitals as sites of female disempowerment, as environments in which male physicians established their expert status and claimed superiority over female midwives and patients. They argue that the hospitals transformed childbirth from a natural event occurring within the supportive feminine space of the home into a medical procedure that was controlled by male practitioners. According to this interpretation, the medicalisation and masculinisation of childbirth sidelined the beliefs and expertise of plebeian women. The third section of the chapter examines the degree to which women exercised control over their confinements when experiencing different models of charity organisation. The section challenges the association of hospitals with powerlessness and working-class homes with agency, suggesting that agency does not reside permanently in an environment, but shifts with time and as actors move in and out of spaces. Plebeian women did not necessarily find charities' regulations repressive; some broke the rules and others found agency in harnessing them to their own priorities. The interventions of friends and family often amplified plebeian patients' agency. Nevertheless, structural conditions sometimes left plebeian women in positions where they were unable to express their agency.

Feminist historians portray agency in binary terms. They argue that accoucheurs (male midwives) oppressed patients; men were ranged against women and the poor against the wealthy. However, historians in search of signs of agency must not confine their attention solely to patients and medical men, but consider the full range of actors involved in lying-in charities —patients' friends and relations, midwives, charity governors, and subscribers. By examining complaints against lying-in charities, the final section shows how actors aligned in different configurations of power, facilitating

and restricting plebeian agency. Rather than fixed within an individual, agency may be expressed collectively or borrowed. To contest feminist historians' characterisation of plebeian women as downtrodden victims, Lisa Forman Cody and Candace Ward show how the patients of eighteenth-century lying-in hospitals broke the rules, stole institutional property, and voiced their dissatisfaction.[11] The final section of the chapter, however, demonstrates that patients did not necessarily express their agency in oppositional terms as resistance. Plebeian women were not a united group. While some women exercised their agency by criticising the charities, others stood in their defence. There could be agency in compliance.

The chapter focuses on the agency of choice, of charity organisation, and of complaint not only because the historiography of childbirth focuses on these issues, but also because these concerns feature prominently in extant sources on lying-in charities. Of all the charities in this dissertation, the lying-in charities have the most detailed surviving minute books. Administrative records provide unparalleled insight into the daily interactions between charity governors, patients, and other actors. They reveal how charities' organisation and employment practices impacted on plebeian action. The most striking aspect of the minute books is that they record the complaints made by plebeian mothers and their families, often revealing intimate details about the experience of charity-assisted childbirth. Minute books, together with medical treatises and case notes, open a window into the birthing room and the power dynamics within.

Historical Context

Philanthropists attempted to introduce charitable lying-in facilities to London in the 1730s, yet the first successful venture was the maternity ward at the Middlesex Infirmary, established in 1747.[12] Some of the governors of the Middlesex Infirmary believed that the hospital did not make

[11] Lisa Forman Cody, 'Living and Dying in Georgian London's Lying-in Hospitals', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 78 (2004), 309-48; Candace Ward, *Desire and Disorder: Fevers, Fictions, and Feeling in English Georgian Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 76-77. James Wyatt Cook and Barbara Collier Cook have noted similar rule-breaking behaviours. James Wyatt Cook and Barbara Collier Cook, *Man-Midwife, Male Feminist: The Life and Times of George Macauley, M.D., Ph.D. (1716-1766)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004), pp. 149-54.
[12] Croxson, p. 27-28.

sufficient provision for expectant mothers and they split off from the institution in 1749 to establish the British Lying-in Hospital, a specialist maternity hospital. The City of London Lying-in Hospital (1750), Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital (1752), and the General Lying-in Hospital (1765) followed, with each hospital servicing its own corner of the metropolis.[13] The founders of the lying-in hospitals claimed that it was as an act of Christian benevolence to assist new mothers and infants, arguably the most vulnerable members of the population. They insisted that hospitals provided an environment for childbirth that was far more comfortable and private than the cramped, dimly lit, and damp lodgings of the poor. Hospitalisation, they argued, gave women a temporary respite from the strain of daily survival, allowing them to concentrate their energies on bringing their children safely into the world.

However, the founders of lying-in hospitals were not solely motivated by concern for plebeian mothers. Medical men used the hospitals to promote themselves as authorities on obstetrics, to gain clinical experience, and build their private clientele.[14] The governors of the lying-in hospitals boasted that they contributed to the advance of medical knowledge. As Donna Andrew shows, the governors of lying-in hospitals also sought to encourage religiosity, good health, and economic (re)productivity among plebeian women.[15] Mid-century philanthropists believed that the population of England was in decline; the lying-in hospitals were designed to provide a steady supply of workers to shore up the nation's economic and military power.[16]

In 1757 a new type of maternity charity appeared in London. The Lying-in Charity for Delivering Poor Married Women at Their Own Habitations, later renamed the Royal Maternity

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[13] The lying-in hospitals changed names several times as they moved location and acquired new patrons. Two distinct institutions carried the name 'General Lying-in Hospital' at one point during their histories. To avoid confusion this chapter will use the naming conventions that the London Metropolitan Archives applies to each hospital's archival collection: the British Lying-in Hospital (1749), the City of London Lying-in Hospital (1750), Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital (1752), and the General Lying-in Hospital (1765).

[14] Revisionist histories, however, point out that the medical staff of lying-in hospitals was primarily female. Margaret Connor Versluysen, 'Medical Professionalisation and Maternity Hospitals in Eighteenth-Century London: A Sociological Interpretation', *Bulletin of the Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 21 (1997), 34-36; Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women's Rights* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 25-27; Marjorie Tew, *Safer Childbirth?: A Critical History of Maternity Care* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1990), p. 44.

[15] Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 65-69.

[16] Ibid.; Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 102, 107-08.

Charity, supplied midwives to assist birthing women at home.[17] The founders of the Royal Maternity Charity claimed that outpatient care was safer than hospitalisation, for it did not enable the spread of puerperal fever by gathering women together in wards. The lying-in hospitals had many upper-class supporters, perhaps drawn to the opportunities for conviviality and public displays of benevolence that a large institution afforded.[18] In contrast, domiciliary charity appealed particularly to commercially minded men for whom economy and productivity were pressing concerns.[19]

Outpatient care was much more economical than hospitalisation. The physician-accoucheur Augustus Granville estimated that lying-in charities could assist sixteen outpatients for the same cost as caring for a single inpatient.[20] Unlike hospitals, outpatient charities did not maintain large buildings, nor did they pay for patients' food or engage staff for cooking, cleaning, washing, and nursing. Along with keeping costs to a minimum, the Royal Maternity Charity claimed that it promoted the self-sufficiency of plebeian families. The governors argued that women who spent weeks in comfortable hospital wards were reluctant to resume their daily toil once their confinement was over. They insisted that, when hospitals provided for plebeian mothers' every need, their husbands who were left at home felt little impetus to work industriously and so adopted unproductive habits like drinking.[21] Meanwhile, children ran riot in their mothers' absence. The Royal Maternity Charity argued that outpatient charity allowed a mother to maintain a supervisory eye over her household, upholding economic and moral standards. Moreover, domiciliary care kept bonds of affection and mutual obligation strong because it did not separate husbands from wives, or mothers from children.[22] The charity claimed that it offered an alternative for women who did not wish to trudge to their nearest lying-in hospital or who found separation from their families distressing.

Donna Andrew argues that philanthropists increasingly turned away from large ostentatious institutions towards smaller localised charities as the eighteenth century progressed. This reflected

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[17] This chapter will subsequently refer to the Lying-in Charity as the Royal Maternity Charity (a name it adopted in 1824) to distinguish the charity from organisations with similar names.
[18] Sarah Lloyd, 'Pleasing Spectacles and Elegant Dinners: Conviviality, Benevolence, and Charity Anniversaries in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), 23-57.
[19] Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, p. 132.
[20] Granville, p. 16.
[21] Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, p. 107.
[22] Ibid., pp. 105-07.

philanthropists' growing interest in efficiency and self-sufficiency. The late eighteenth century also saw a shift in how philanthropists viewed population. Political economists such as Adam Smith, Joseph Adams, and Thomas Malthus argued that economic resources were finite and that an unobstructed free market regulated population.[23] Some commentators believed that charities upset the natural balance between the market and population, allowing the growth of an idle and dependent class of people who consumed the nation's resources. While mid-century philanthropists had fretted that there were too few babies to maintain England's power, by the end of the century many commentators were concerned that there were too many. Andrew claims that concerns about overpopulation compromised the popularity of both the Royal Maternity Charity and lying-in hospitals among subscribers.[24] Nevertheless, the hospitals were more vulnerable to accusations of rashly encouraging population growth than were the outpatient charities, for the hospitals offered material 'inducements' to reproduction that the outpatient charities did not. As Reverend Stone describes in his tale, the hospital inpatient received 'gratuitous board, lodging, medical attendance, churching, registry of her child's baptism, &c. &c' while the outpatient typically received only a midwife to attend her.[25]

The lying-in hospitals that had been founded in the eighteenth century continued to operate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but there was little expansion of inpatient services in the metropolis after 1765. The obstetric ward at Guy's Hospital (est. 1831) was the sole inpatient facility founded in the early nineteenth century. In contrast, the cost-effective outpatient charities multiplied. Small specialist outpatient charities were founded for women residing in specific districts of the metropolis, such as the Finsbury Lying-in Institution (1823). Many general dispensaries offered outpatient maternity care as part of their range of services. The lying-in hospitals also branched out into domiciliary care. The Middlesex Infirmary began offering outpatient services in 1764.[26] The General, Queen Charlotte's, and British lying-in hospitals also opened outpatient departments.[27] The

[23] Ibid., p. 178.
[24] Ibid., pp. 179-80.
[25] Stone, p. 14.
[26] The hospital closed its maternity ward in 1786 and offered only outpatient services. Croxson, p. 27.
[27] Highmore, *Pietas Londinensis*, pp. 184, 210.

minute books of the British Lying-in Hospital provide some insight into why the hospitals provided outpatient services. When the governors of the British Lying-in Hospital considered catering to outpatients in 1826, the number of women applying for admission was in decline. The governors may have believed that domiciliary care would attract more patients, allowing the charity to compete with other organisations (by this time both the General and Queen Charlotte's hospitals had been catering to outpatients for years). Plebeian women's demand for home births may have shaped charitable provision. The hospital was also under pressure from subscribers. Mere months before the governors opened the outpatient department, a subscriber had cancelled her subscription on learning the hospital only assisted inpatients.[28] Although the minute books do not record why the subscriber wished for outpatient care, she may have believed domiciliary care to be more economical or better for families than hospitalisation. It is also possible that the subscriber voiced the preferences of the plebeian women she knew and whom she might ultimately recommend for charitable assistance.

The lying-in charities were not intended for the poorest of Londoners. Amid concerns about idleness and overpopulation, the charities did not wish to encourage the multiplication of beggars or destitute people. The charities targeted the 'respectable' poor instead. The General Lying-in Hospital was for 'the Wives of poor Industrious Tradesmen and Mechanics, who, either from unavoidable misfortunes, or the burthen of large families, are reduced to want […] as also for the Wives of indigent Soldiers and Seamen'.[29] Charity publicity emphasised that patients' poverty was not the product of moral failings, but of conditions which were beyond their control. An unforeseen decline in business, the extra pressure of a large family, or the absence of a soldier or sailor husband from home were situations which did not reflect badly on women's characters. Almost all lying-in charities assisted only married or recently widowed women, so as not to encourage immoral sexual relationships.

[28] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/006, 29 December 1826.
[29] *General Lying-in Hospital, Formerly Called the Westminster Lying-in Hospital, Bridge Road, Lambeth* (London: T. Romney, 1823), p. 7.

The Agency of Choice

Many studies of lying-in charities suggest that expectant working-class mothers had few choices. Lieske and Leavitt claim that poor women were so desperate for assistance that they accepted whatever charity they could secure, no matter how demeaning.[30] However, it is not accurate to claim that all plebeian women lacked options. Maternity care was among the most abundant forms of charity in the early nineteenth-century metropolis. Anthony Highmore's guide to London charities, *Pietas Londinensis*, featured eleven organisations that provided medical assistance during childbirth and it was not exhaustive.[31] The sheer number of maternity charities gave significant scope for plebeian women to exercise their choice. As the previous section explains, the expansion of lying-in services was, in part, an attempt to cater to the needs and desires of the poor. Highmore observed that 'the public benevolence meets every obstacle' enabling 'the poor, and those in the class next above poverty, [to] take their choice [of lying-in assistance] according to their own existing circumstances'.[32]

Perhaps the most important choice for plebeian women was that between institutional and domiciliary care. The hospitals were an attractive option for women whose lodgings were unsuited for childbirth or who did not have friends or relations who were capable of caring for them at home. Sarah Buckley entered the Queen's Lying-in Hospital in 1825. Her reasons for doing so are not recorded, yet it is likely that her living situation was a factor. Buckley's husband was dead and she lodged in a single room with two men, one woman, and a child.[33] Mary Ann Ashford accepted a recommendation to the British Lying-in Hospital because her husband was ill and her lodgings consisted of 'but one apartment, and that dreadfully noisy'.[34] The hospitals may also have appealed to women who enjoyed the camaraderie and material comforts of life on the wards.

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[30] Lieske, p. 75; Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750 to 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 74, 172.
[31] Highmore, *Pietas Londinensis*.
[32] A. Highmore, *Philanthropia Metropolitana: A View of the Charitable Institutions Established in and near London, Chiefly during the Last Twelve Years* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822), p. 625.
[33] OBP, April 1826, Sarah Sarsfield (t18260406-184).
[34] Mary Ann Ashford, *Life of a Licensed Victualler's Daughter. Written by Herself* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844), p. 64.

Outpatient charities may have attracted women who did not wish to be separated from their families, who preferred a homely environment, or who could not afford to leave their domestic duties of work for a three-week stay in hospital. Augustus Granville of the Westminster General Dispensary claimed that some mothers did not wish to broadcast their poverty by entering a lying-in hospital, so opted for more discreet outpatient care.[35] Occasional outbreaks of childbed fever caused high mortality in lying-in wards; plebeian women may have chosen outpatient relief in the belief (usually well founded) that it was safer. When Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital reopened its doors after a bout of fever in 1823, many of the patients ignored the charity's instruction for them to present themselves for admission and instead gave birth at home.[36] Fear of experimentation or dissection, along with fear of fever, may have kept women at home. Plebeian Londoners knew that medical men routinely experimented on hospital inmates and dissected patients after death.[37] Poor families were suspicious that lying-in hospitals were sites of experimentation.[38] In 1791 the governors of the City of London Lying-in Hospital scrapped the idea of providing a separate room for women in labour when the matron advised that 'experiments would be suggested and suspected'.[39] Women may have opted for outpatient care because it meant that they need never be out of their families' protective sight.

The mixed economy of healthcare extended beyond charity. Expectant mothers could approach poor law authorities for a parish midwife or admission into a workhouse infirmary. Parish relief, however, was often restricted to those with settlements and conditions within the workhouses were inferior to those within the lying-in hospitals. If they had the funds, plebeian parents could also pay for a local midwife to attend them privately.

It is difficult to establish how plebeian women learned of the choices that were available to them, for administrative records and medical texts rarely note how patients found out about relief. However, it is likely that mothers gathered information from charity subscribers, charity staff, and

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[35] Granville, pp. 13-14.
[36] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/003, 19 February 1823.
[37] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).
[38] Medical men did use experimental techniques on the patients of lying-in hospitals. However, Lisa Forman Cody suggests that rumours about experimentation within the hospitals were often overblown. Cody, 'Living and Dying', pp. 339-40.
[39] Ralph B. Cannings, *The City of London Maternity Hospital: A Short History* (London: J. Forsaith, 1922), p. 24.

other mothers. Reverend Stone claimed that district visiting societies assisted poor women to identify maternity care.[40] Medical men and druggists may also have advised women about their options.[41] Some women actively pursued admission into a specific charity. In 1807 Elizabeth Harris asked the porter of the British Lying-in Hospital where she could obtain a letter of recommendation to the institution.[42] It was common for patients to develop a preference for a particular lying-in charity and return to it during successive pregnancies.[43] Women may have returned to a charity because they were satisfied with its services or because they had become attached to its staff. Mary Ann Neale told the governors of the British Lying-in Hospital that she would gladly return to the institution, for 'if her own Mother had attended her during her Confinement, she could not have been better treated' than she had been under the care of Mrs Buttruss, the matron.[44] For Neale, the British Lying-in Hospital was not a last resort, but rather a satisfactory choice. She was not a victim to necessity, but rather an agent of her own desires.

However, women's agency to choose did have its limits. There were structural constraints on choices. Lying-in charities employed a recommendation system, allowing subscribers to recommend a set number of patients each year. In order to obtain relief from the charity of their choice, plebeian women had to find a subscriber with an unallocated recommendation to that institution. This was not always an easy task, particularly for women who did not have established relationships with subscribers. Elizabeth Harris' decision to ask the porter where she could get a recommendation may reflect desperation rather than choice; she may have been going from hospital to hospital in the hope of finding success somewhere. Indeed, the porter seemed to have sensed her vulnerability, for he broke hospital regulations and demanded money from her, which she gave him.[45] Charity governors recorded few details about patients' lives, yet scattered clues suggest that there was great diversity in women's economic and social circumstances. The hospitals seemed to attract women from both

[40] Stone, pp. 296-97, 300.
[41] *To a Mother on the Birth of Her Child* (London: Religious Tract Society, [1830?]), p. 3.
[42] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/004, 20 November 1807.
[43] The City of London Lying-in Hospital reported that some patients had given birth to ten or eleven children in the institution. Highmore, *Philanthropia Metropolitana*, p. 624.
[44] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/006, 12 June 1829.
[45] Ibid.

extremes of the working class —women in such distress that they seized any chance of a roof over their heads and women whose economic situation was so stable that they were assured of a recommendation and could afford to spend several weeks in hospital. However, even women who possessed social capital may have felt as if they had little choice. Many middle and upper-class Londoners subscribed to medical charities to secure healthcare for their employees or the wives of their servants.[46] A woman who rejected her mistress' recommendation might be considered ungrateful and could potentially throw her employment into jeopardy.

Geography also constrained the choices of plebeian women. With no access to public transport or money for carriage fare, poor mothers usually walked to the lying-in hospitals. Faced with the prospect of such physical exertion while pregnant, some women likely settled for their nearest institution. Inpatient care may have been impractical for women who did not live in the vicinity of a hospital. Outpatient charity also had geographical restrictions. Each outpatient charity confined its assistance to women who resided within a set area of London. Thus, the range of choices available to a mother varied according to her place of residence. Women who lived near Westminster, which had an abundance of lying-in charities, had far more options than their counterparts in Southwark, where the charities were not so plentiful.

The lying-in charities' preference for 'respectable' women also limited the choices available to some women. Almost all lying-in charities assisted only married or recently widowed women because they did not wish to encourage sexual immorality. Unmarried expectant mothers had very few options. The City of London and General Lying-in Hospitals admitted single women. The governors of these two institutions argued that providing birthing facilities for unmarried women was an act of Christian sympathy and might prevent distressed mothers from committing suicide or infanticide.[47] However, the hospitals extended this 'indulgence' only once to each mother; women who were pregnant with their second illegitimate child were turned away.[48]

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[46] *The Lancet*, 8 March 1834, p. 899.
[47] *Plan of Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital, Manor-House, Lisson-Green: Instituted in January, 1752* (London: Edward Bridgewater, 1823), p. ix.
[48] *General Lying-in Hospital*, p. 7.

Most lying-in charities had administrative procedures that were designed to weed out applicants who were not respectable. Women who wished to obtain relief from a lying-in charity had to first obtain a letter of recommendation from a charity subscriber. The governors of some charities interviewed applicants to establish their characters and insisted that they present their marriage certificates for inspection. The hospitals expected women to be clean and vermin-free when admitted and some required patients to supply their own linen. Destitute women likely had difficulty meeting these conditions. Newspaper reports of women giving birth in pitiable conditions reveal that some women struggled to secure any assistance, let alone their preferred care. After arriving one stormy night in London from Hereford, Harriet Purle went into labour on a doorstep. She may have given birth there had a passing gentleman not afforded her assistance. He conveyed her to a lying-in hospital but, not having the correct paperwork, she was refused. She was eventually admitted into Lambeth Workhouse, just in time for the birth of her daughter.[49] Purle was not in a position of agency. Her choices were severely constrained.

However, there were ways in which 'improper objects' could circumvent charity regulations. Mothers frequently obtained linen from wealthy women or benevolent societies so that they could enter hospitals.[50] Single women lied about their marital status or borrowed marriage certificates to convince charities that they were deserving of relief. Sarah Scarberry gained admittance into the City of London Lying-in Hospital under a false name before she was exposed as 'a Common prostitute & a Single Woman'.[51] Tanya Evans has found instances of unmarried women obtaining entry into hospitals for married women in the eighteenth century. Hospital governors usually became aware of such deceptions only when they received a tip-off or when the death of a mother sent them in search of a surviving infant's father. Evans suggests that the cases she has identified may be only 'the tip of an iceberg' as many unmarried mothers may have avoided detection.[52] The governors of early

[49] *The Standard*, 17 September 1829.
[50] S.R. Bosanquet, *The Rights of the Poor and Christian Almsgiving Vindicated; or, The State and Character of the Poor, and the Conduct and Duties of the Rich, Exhibited and Illustrated* (London: James Burns, 1841), p. 188.
[51] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/007, 29 January 1834.
[52] Tanya Evans, *Unfortunate Objects': Lone Mothers in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 154.

nineteenth-century lying-in hospitals may have been similarly oblivious to many plebeian attempts to deceive them.

Women could also capitalise on their vulnerable condition to secure assistance. Some women who were not registered objects (beneficiaries) of lying-in hospitals presented themselves on the doorsteps on the institutions in the throes of labour. These women often appeared late at night or in the early hours of the morning, when governors were absent and it was up to matrons or porters to decide whether or not to admit them. This was a risky strategy that perhaps only the most desperate and friendless women attempted. As Harriet Purle discovered, the hospitals occasionally turned away mothers in labour.[53] Yet, in many other cases, staff did admit women in labour. Hospital records usually do not reveal why staff did so, although it is possible to conjecture. They may have felt sympathy for the women or they may have considered it their Christian duty to help. The Biblical resonances of refusing shelter to a birthing woman may have been difficult to ignore. Hospitals that refused to assist women in need occasionally received negative publicity from newspapers that traded in pathetic tales of distress.[54] Staff may have reasoned that strict adherence to the rules was not worth damaging the institution's reputation.

Faced with the urgency of an approaching birth, hospital staff may also have neglected to check that women met entry requirements or possessed the correct paperwork. Plebeian women may have anticipated that sympathy and the stress of the moment would get them over the threshold. It was often only after a patient was in a ward ―and could not be moved for medical reasons― that hospital staff realised that she was not a proper object of charity. In 1813 Charlotte Baxter appeared at Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital in labour. She claimed that a subscriber by the name of Mrs Moy had sent her and she was admitted. Later, the governors discovered that Mrs Moy was not a subscriber and that she denied having directed Baxter to the hospital.[55] In some cases, the physical vulnerability of birthing women and the urgency of their situation made it difficult for them to access assistance, leaving them in situations that were far from empowering. And yet, some mothers capitalised on these

[53] *The Standard*, 17 September 1829.
[54] See for example *The Examiner*, 20 September 1829.
[55] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/001, 30 April 1813.

seeming disadvantages, using them strategically to overcome institutional barriers. There was agency in the appearance of helplessness.

Hospital regulations not only attempted to restrict who could gain entry, but also how long patients could remain within hospital walls. The lying-in hospitals were eager to assist as many women as possible, provided they met the requirements. In a crowded charitable environment, the lying-in charities used patient numbers to compete against each other. Large numbers of patients were proof of an institution's impact and impressed potential subscribers. The hospitals also needed to process large numbers of women to meet their obligations to subscribers. If the hospital governors were to accommodate all the patients whom subscribers had the right to recommend, they required an efficient turnover of patients. To ensure that beds were not occupied by those who did not need them, hospital governors attempted to limit the duration of patients' stay. Hospital rules stated that women should not be admitted until they were within forty-eight hours of giving birth and they were not to remain for longer than three weeks. Aside from maximising the number of patients who could be admitted, these policies were designed to ensure that plebeian women were not idle or separated from their families or domestic duties for longer than was absolutely necessary. The hospitals were conscious not to encourage dependence.

Medical men in the early nineteenth century lacked the technology to accurately measure the development of a baby in utero.[56] In 1825 and 1826 the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords attempted to resolve the Gardner Peerage inheritance dispute, a case that hinged on the duration of human pregnancy.[57] To establish how long pregnancy could last, the committee heard from charity accoucheurs who acknowledged that they were almost wholly reliant on patients' statements to

[56] Amalie M. Kass, '"Called to Her at Three O'Clock A.M.": Obstetrical Practice in Physician Case Notes', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 50 (1995), 194-229 (p. 209).
[57] Henry Fenton Gardner, one of two men who claimed the inheritance of Captain Gardner, had been born more than ten months after his mother had parted company with her husband, Captain Gardner. In order to establish if Henry Gardner was the Captain's son or the issue of a man who had had relations with Mrs Gardner in her husband's absence, the committee sought to establish whether pregnancy could last longer than ten months. Margot Finn, Michael Lobban, and Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Introduction: Spurious Issues', in *Legitimacy and Illegitimacy in Nineteenth-Century Law, Literature and History*, ed. by Margot Finn, Michael Lobban, and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1-24 (p. 8).

calculate how far pregnancies had progressed.[58] Plebeian mothers also gave evidence before the committee, stating that they used the dates when they had stopped breastfeeding a previous child, had sexual intercourse, ceased menstruation, or quickened to estimate how far along they were.[59] Like medical men, the governors of lying-in hospitals relied on mothers to accurately estimate their delivery dates. When applying at the hospital in the final months of pregnancy, women informed the governors when they anticipated that they would lie-in. The governors then expected the women to return and be admitted when labour was imminent.

Many mothers supplied inaccurate information to hospital governors and were consequently admitted into the wards long before their labours. Elizabeth Hard entered the City of London Lying-in Hospital on 28 March 1812 and was still in the institution on 6 May, when the matron believed she was still months away from labour.[60] Of course, it is possible that mothers may have simply been mistaken. Interpreting pregnancy cues was not an exact science. Mary Parker, a patient of the Westminster General Dispensary, told the Gardner-Peerage committee that she was nearly eleven months pregnant.[61] However, the governors of the lying-in hospitals seemed to have believed that extended stays were the product of calculation rather than miscalculation. Anthony Highmore, Secretary of the City of London Lying-in Hospital, claimed that women purposely applied for admission early and that 'the uncertainty of [labour] was the pretence for this imposition'.[62]

Hospital governors introduced measures to penalise women who broke the rules. If patients did not give birth within forty-eight hours after entering the City of London Lying-in Hospital, they were required to contribute one shilling and sixpence each day for board and lodging.[63] The British Lying-in Hospital charged similar fees if patients remained in the institution for longer than three weeks.[64] The fines were not, however, an entirely effective deterrent. Some women simply paid the

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[58] *The Medical Evidence Relative to the Duration of Human Pregnancy, as Given in the Gardner Peerage Cause, before the Committee for Privileges of the House of Lords in 1825-6*, ed. by Robert Lyall (London: Burgess and Hill, 1826), pp. 30, 46, 69, 82.
[59] Ibid., pp. 87-96.
[60] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/006, 6 May 1812.
[61] *Medical Evidence*, p. 86.
[62] Highmore, *Pietas Londinensis*, p. 206.
[63] Ibid.
[64] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/004, 28 July 1809.

fees. Rebecca Conyer paid five guineas and took up residence in Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital for nearly three months.[65] When called on to pay, some women claimed that they did not have any savings. The governors of the City of London Lying-in Hospital considered amending the hospital regulations to stop this behaviour, but eventually decided against doing so because they did not want to discourage poor women from applying for relief.[66] The hospitals were unable to address their patients' behaviour without compromising their foundational aims. Evicting women was often not an option, for medical men believed that physical upheaval could be harmful to very pregnant or newly delivered women. There was agency in the appearance of fragility.

Some historians argue that male medical practitioners reduced women's control over their own bodies. As Leavitt argues, when women in labour were removed from their homes to hospital they were 'no longer the main actors; instead, physicians acted on women's bodies'.[67] The argument is that accoucheurs made pregnancy into a medical condition that only a physician's jargon could describe and his instruments manage; women were alienated from their own bodies and 'reduced […] to their reproductive organs' under the medical gaze.[68] Yet, lying-in patients had considerable insight into their own bodies, insight that medical men and charity governors lacked. By presenting their knowledge in a certain way, plebeian mothers were able to determine the duration of their hospitalisation.

Although the hospital governors hoped that patients would enter hospital mere hours before delivery, they believed that it was unsafe for newly delivered women to leave the institution soon after childbirth. Medical men advised women to remain in bed for at least one week after delivery to avoid haemorrhaging and fever. However, not all plebeian mothers wished to undergo a long lying-in period and some requested to be discharged prematurely. The hospital governors insisted that patients obtain their consent before leaving the hospital, but they ultimately had no right to detain women against their will and had little choice but to discharge patients who insisted on departing. In 1824 Sarah

[65] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/001, 13 August 1811.
[66] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/006, 23 December 1818.
[67] Leavitt, p. 190.
[68] Lieske, p. 79; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Routledge, 1973).

Bolter, claiming that three children at home needed her, discharged herself from the British Lying-in Hospital against the matron's wishes.[69] Self-discharge was problematic for the governors. If patients developed medical complications after leaving the institution, the hospital might take the blame.[70] To absolve itself of responsibility in such cases, from 1828 the British Lying-in Hospital required patients who wished to be discharged to submit a petition outlining the reasons behind their requests; the governors and medical men then made a memorandum if they consented to discharge.[71] This paperwork ensured that the choices and actions of patients and hospital staff could not later be misconstrued. The hospitals attempted to contain the repercussions of patients' choices, yet they were unable to prevent patients from using the institutions as they saw fit.

Expectant mothers in early nineteenth-century London were not without choice. Their choices were not static, but rather a 'mosaic of changing opportunities'.[72] A woman's options varied according to her connections, her place of residence, and her moral status. To secure relief, expectant mothers had to adapt to fleeting opportunities; they exercised their agency by anticipating charity governors' demands, feeding them carefully curated information, and capitalising on the powers that pregnancy temporarily gave them.

Agency and Charity Organisation

Feminist historians claim that the birth environment determines the agency of lying-in women. For Leavitt, the plebeian home was an empowering space in which birthing women had power over their own bodies and were able to privilege their own needs and desires above those of medical practitioners.[73] In contrast, the lying-in hospital was an institution of social control. According to Leavitt, plebeian patients were passive, intimidated by the alien hospital environment, constant surveillance, strict institutional rules, and authoritative medical men. However, this interpretation lacks nuance. The hospitals did not necessarily have a disciplining influence on their

[69] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/005, 3 September 1824.
[70] Hospitals occasionally faced criticism for discharging patients early. See for example LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/005, 17 April 1818.
[71] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/006, 8 February 1828.
[72] Montenach and Simonton, pp. 4-5.
[73] Leavitt, pp. 39, 59, 190.

patients, while outpatients were not always able to control the circumstances under which they gave birth. Agency is not fixed within an environment. It shifts as different actors and their individual concerns and motivations interact within a space.

The lying-in hospitals attempted to regulate the conduct of patients. Rules prohibited patients from bringing food or drink into the hospital or from leaving the grounds without permission. Mothers were not permitted to rise from their beds for one week after giving birth. Visits were severely restricted. In 1815 the City of London Lying-in Hospital allowed preparturient patients to see one visitor each day for a time not exceeding fifteen minutes. Recently delivered women could not have visitors.[74] Staff were on duty on the wards both day and night. Yet, despite their isolation from friends and family and constant supervision, the patients were far from tractable. Many of the rule-breaking behaviours which Lisa Forman Cody finds in the hospitals during the eighteenth century were also common in the following century.[75] Ann Gearny, a patient of the City of London Lying-in Hospital concealed wine, beer, and gin from the nurses and consumed it secretly at night.[76] Some patients refused to comply with medical orders. Mary Wright repeatedly refused the leeches that the accoucheur at the General Lying-in Hospital recommended.[77] The hospital governors attempted to penalise patients for disobedience. When a woman misbehaved, the governors often wrote to the subscriber who had recommended her or they blacklisted her, preventing her from receiving future assistance. Nevertheless, there were limits to the hospitals' ability to punish. As noted above, the supposed fragility of mothers' health meant they could not be easily evicted, while fines were unenforceable when patients pleaded poverty. The governors' constant reiterations of the rules might be taken as evidence of the all-pervasive control of officials; however, they are better understood as (largely ineffective) attempts to prevent misbehaviour that the governors could not adequately punish.

While some patients bent hospital rules, many others adhered to them. It is possible to view compliance as 'submission' and suggest that plebeian women did not have agency to voice their

[74] This rule was bent when a newly delivered mother was seriously ill or dying. LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/006, 20 December 1815.
[75] Cody, 'Living and Dying', p. 325.
[76] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/007, 27 January 1830.
[77] LMA, General Lying-in Hospital medical officers' case book, H01/GLI/B/19/001, May 1828.

wishes or resist official dictates. Yet, such an interpretation presupposes that the values and desires of patients were diametrically opposed to those of hospital governors and staff. This was not necessarily the case. Patients and hospital authorities might have similar values. Lynn MacKay suggests that the applicants to lying-in hospitals shared the governors' concern for respectability.[78] The governors of the British Lying-in Hospital admitted only 'respectable' married women because they did not wish to encourage extra-marital sex. Many plebeian women were equally concerned about sexual reputation. Mary Ann Ashford, a sergeant's wife, applied to the hospital in 1818. When the hospital governors rejected her application because she did not have a signed letter, Ashford was mortified lest her fellow applicants mistakenly think she had been turned away for being a single mother.[79]

Accoucheurs hoped that charity patients, just like their social superiors, would benefit from the latest developments in the field of midwifery. Medical men prescribed extended periods of rest, bland nourishment, and a calm atmosphere for plebeian and middle-class patients alike. Many patients embraced middle-class lying-in standards and were annoyed when these standards were not upheld. In1827 Rosetta Pendergrass, a patient of the British Lying-in Hospital, complained that her fellow patient Margaret Walsh monopolised the nurses' attention, disturbed the 'Patients in general' by allowing her child to cry, and 'never got up to Breakfast like the other Patients and altogether made herself very unpleasant and disagreeable'.[80] Pendergrass expected to have a restful confinement, just as the physicians ordered. She expected patients to obey the rules and to behave with consideration towards both staff and other patients, as the governors also expected. She suggested that Walsh's behaviour was antisocial, disturbing the communal harmony of the wards and depriving patients of a peaceful birthing environment. Pendergrass' references to the 'Patients in general' and the 'other Patients' suggests that the majority of women in the ward felt similarly to her. Pendergrass did not merely submit to regulations. She took ownership of and upheld the values of her social superiors,

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[78] Lynn MacKay, *Respectability and the London Poor, 1780-1870: The Value of Virtue* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 111.
[79] Ashford, p. 66.
[80] Margaret Walsh complained to the hospital governors that a nurse had mistreated her and that she had been kept in dirty sheets. The governors interviewed Rosetta Pendergrass in the hope of confirming or disproving Walsh's allegations. Pendergrass not only claimed that Walsh's allegations were unfounded, but took the opportunity to criticise Walsh's behaviour. LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/006, 12 January 1827.

gaining a sense of self-importance in the process. Agency is often characterised as rebellion or resistance, but the agency of lying-in patients could also be expressed through compliance. Furthermore, the Pendergrass case illustrates that, while hospitals may have been sites of surveillance, the disciplinary gaze was not wielded solely by figures of authority. Plebeian women policed each other.

However, not all plebeian women aspired to experience a middle-class lying-in. There was often a mismatch between the childbearing practices of poor women and the medical advice of accoucheurs. The anonymous author of *The London Practice of Midwifery* noted that poor women viewed lying-in 'as a period when good living and jollity should be universal; and such women think that their husbands are then bound to feed them and their friends better than at other times'.[81] This emphasis on rowdy celebration clashed with accoucheurs' conviction that a quiet environment was essential for recovery after childbirth. Plebeian women also held medical beliefs which did not agree with those of medical men. Physicians recommended that the birthing room be kept at a moderate temperature, but some plebeian women believed that heat was necessary to ward off chills.[82] Accoucheurs warned that rich food and spirituous liquors could cause haemorrhaging, fever, or inflammation in newly delivered women and render their breast milk indigestible. Robert Gooch, a physician to two lying-in hospitals in London, advised patients to eat only 'gruel and barley-water' for three days after delivery, with absolutely 'no solid meat, [and] no broth'.[83] This diet seemed inadequate to poor people who believed that substantial meals and spirituous liquors shored up a woman's strength in labour and hastened her recovery.[84] Evangelical tracts designed for new mothers

[81] *The London Practice of Midwifery; to Which Are Added, Instructions for the Treatment of Lying-in Women, and the Principal Diseases of Children*, 3rd edn (London: John Murray, 1811), p. 256.
[82] *The London Medical Gazette*, 25 February 1832, p. 787; John Clarke, *Practical Essays on the Management of Pregnancy and Labour; and on the Inflammatory and Febrile Diseases of Lying-in Women*, 2nd edn (London: J. Johnson, 1806), p. 27.
[83] Robert Gooch, *A Practical Compendium of Midwifery; Being the Course of Lectures on Midwifery, and on the Diseases of Women and Infants, Delivered at St Bartholomew's Hospital*, ed. by George Skinner (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1831), p. 268.
[84] John Power, *A Treatise on Midwifery; Developing New Principles, Which Tend Materially to Lessen the Sufferings of the Patient, and Shorten the Duration of Labour* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1819), p. 208.

warned that working-class childbirth practices were old-fashioned and dangerous, yet many charity patients were not swayed by such arguments.[85]

Hospital patients were occasionally able to pursue plebeian childbirth practices, smuggling in spirituous liquors, for instance. However, domiciliary settings gave patients greater scope to exercise agency in this way. While patients' friends and relatives were almost entirely excluded from the lying-in hospitals, outpatients were often surrounded by friends, family, and neighbours. These (mostly female) attendants were not silent observers, but active participants in the birthing room. They intervened during labour, sometimes urging women to 'bear down' against the instruction of accoucheurs.[86] They annoyed medical men by crowding around the patient, telling stories and conversing amongst themselves. Accoucheurs claimed that noisy attendants affected the mental state of a labouring woman, reducing her confidence and sapping her of energy; however, plebeian attendants may have felt that they encouraged or expressed solidarity with the birthing woman.[87] After delivery, attendants cared for the patient, often supplying her with banned victuals and heating the room.[88]

Friends and relatives considered themselves spokesmen for outpatients' interests. They gave and withheld consent for medical procedures, especially when patients were incapable of expressing their own wishes because they were in pain or unconscious. Attendants also determined what could be done in the event of the mother's death. In 1817 John Ramsbotham, accoucheur to the Royal Maternity Charity, was unable to perform a caesarian section on a deceased mother because the woman's husband and bystanders 'scouted the idea'.[89] Charity medical attendants did not cow plebeian attendants. The accoucheur John Power observed that he could manage attendants only with the 'greatest difficulty'. He resorted to 'stratagems' to get his patient to himself, including clearing the

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[85] Esther Copley, *Cottage Comforts, with Hints for Promoting Them, Gleaned from Experience*, 12th edn (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), pp. 157-60. For more on working-class lying-in practices see Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England, 1660-1770* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 204-05.
[86] Clarke, p. 16.
[87] Thomas Bull, *Hints to Mothers, for the Management of Health during the Period of Pregnancy, and in the Lying-in Room; with an Exposure of Popular Errors in Connexion with Those Subjects* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1837), pp. 129-30; Clarke, p. 21.
[88] See for example RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/10, 29 November 1821.
[89] John Ramsbotham, *Practical Observations in Midwifery, with a Selection of Cases* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1821), p. 393.

room by insisting that the woman needed to sleep between contractions.[90] Power suggested that he could exert his authority only if he isolated a labouring woman from her attendants. This suggests that the collective agency exercised jointly by plebeian mothers and their attendants was more forceful than the agency of a solitary birthing woman.

It was not only friends, family, and neighbours who exercised collective agency with plebeian outpatients. Midwives in the employment of lying-in charities were typically from the 'skilled tradesman class, being the wives and widows of shoemakers, tallow-chandlers, carpenters, malsters, masons, butchers, and the like'.[91] Women did not need professional qualifications to practice as midwives, although many lying-in charities expected new midwives to attend a course of lectures on obstetrics or undergo a probationary training period under a more experienced midwife. In terms of social class and education, midwives had more in common with their patients than with the accoucheurs. Some midwives embraced plebeian childbirth practices rather than the middle-class practices of accoucheurs. Dr Granville noted disparagingly that many midwives were 'full of the most absurd prejudices and long exploded ideas'.[92] With their working-class outlook, midwives may have tolerated ―or even encouraged― behaviour that medical men condemned. The nurses whom plebeian women engaged reportedly turned a blind eye to alcohol consumption and, judging by the frequency with which midwives were described as drunk, they too may have condoned a celebratory atmosphere in the birthing room.[93]

Constant surveillance may have prevented patients and their attendants from disobeying physicians' orders, yet this was not possible in an outpatient setting. Midwives delivered babies and made several postpartum visits, but they did not maintain a constant vigil at patients' bedsides. Accoucheurs had even less contact with patients, for they attended only when women experienced difficulty in labour or developed complications. Outpatients spent much of their lying-in period unsupervised by medical attendants. Dr Granville observed that 'the Dispensary patient is not so immediately under the control of the physician as the Hospital patient; nor so much under his vigilant

[90] Power, pp. 213-14.
[91] Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, p. 27.
[92] Granville, p. 202.
[93] *London Practice of Midwifery*, p. 256.

interference as in private practice; so that very often his advice is neglected —his injunctions over-ruled— and the timely use of medicines rejected'.[94] Patients frequently followed their own initiative in the absence of medical practitioners. Dr Ramsbotham of the Royal Maternity Charity claimed that one of his patients sat fully dressed by the fire a mere three days after delivery, when she should have been recumbent in bed.[95] Medical men were interlopers in plebeian homes. While accoucheurs could induce patients to observe their orders, they were often able to do so only when in the physical presence of their patients. For the long stretches of time when medical practitioners were not in the birthing room, plebeian women had ample opportunity to satisfy their own needs and desires.

Some historians argue that the domiciliary environment shored up women's agency, providing them with comfort, control, and companionship. While this could certainly be the case, plebeian women did not always feel empowered when giving birth at home. Indeed, for some women, labouring at home was a frightening and isolating experience over which they had little control. Medical assistance was usually close at hand in the lying-in hospitals, but this was not the case for outpatients. Each outpatient lying-in charity had a staff of midwives. A successful applicant to a lying-in charity received a ticket listing the name and addresses of the midwives. With the onset of her labour pangs, she sent a friend or relative (often her husband) to fetch a midwife from her residence. This was not always a straightforward task. Midwives were often away from their homes when called on or refused to attend women in labour. The minute books of outpatient charities are filled with the complaints of plebeian parents who had difficulty securing a charity midwife. One of the complainants was George Fox who, late one December night in 1804, ran about the city trying to find a Royal Maternity Charity midwife for his wife. After applying to three charity midwives without success, he eventually paid for a private midwife.[96] It was common for parents to engage private (non-charity) midwives or even give birth without medical assistance when they could not secure a charity midwife.[97] Even if midwives did attend women in labour, they often did not see the entire process through and left their patients to face critical moments without their guidance. In such situations,

[94] Granville, pp. 26-27.
[95] *The London Medical Gazette*, 25 February 1832, p. 787.
[96] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/7, 27 December 1804.
[97] See for example *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 March 1823; Granville, p. 205.

plebeian patients did not have agency. The minute books testify to the anxiety and desperation parents felt when they were denied medical attention.

The difficulty of obtaining midwives was, in part, due to the way in which outpatient charities managed their staff. Midwives had very heavy workloads. The Royal Maternity Charity boasted that it delivered 4473 women in 1803, an average of 172 deliveries per midwife.[98] The Royal Maternity Charity was unusual because it prohibited its midwives from working for any other charity. Midwives who were not in the employ of the Royal Maternity Charity commonly worked for several other charities concurrently. Eight of the seventeen midwives who were attached to the outpatient department of Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital in 1823 were also engaged by the General Lying-in Hospital.[99] As midwives were paid a set amount for each woman they delivered, it made financial sense to increase their clientele by working for multiple charities. In her capacity as midwife to a handful of lying-in institutions, Mary Tungate claimed that she could deliver more than two hundred women in a single year.[100] Given the number of women under their care and the unpredictable timing of childbirth, it is little wonder that midwives were frequently unavailable when summoned or that they divided their time between several patients.

In addition to charity cases, most midwives also had private paying patients. Private patients often paid midwives well, supplementing money with perquisites of food and drink. Private patients paid midwives directly. In contrast, midwives had to collect tickets from charity patients and submit these in person to charity governors before they received their pay. Outpatient charities forbade patients from giving 'gratuities' and midwives from receiving them. Because the compensation offered by private patients was both greater and easier to obtain, midwives preferred them to charity cases. Charity outpatients often alleged that midwives failed to attend them because they had charity tickets, neglected them in favour of paying patients, or treated them harshly because they were charity patients.

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[98] *Account of the Lying-in Charity*, p. 7.
[99] *Plan of Queen Charlotte's*, p. 42; *General Lying-in Hospital*, p. 5.
[100] *Medical Evidence*, p. 102.

Some midwives took advantage of the urgency of labour and demanded payment from charity patients, against charity rules. A few midwives even threatened not to provide assistance unless money was forthcoming. Mrs Relfe of the Royal Maternity Charity allegedly stated that if a charity patient 'put the Ticket on one side and paid her 10/6 she would have staid with her 12 hours', instead of leaving her to attend another labour. Mrs Relfe also reportedly complained that 'the Charity would not find her bread and cheese'.[101] Midwives also abused the ticket system. Rather than adhering to charity regulations and collecting tickets from patients after having seen them safely through their lying-in, some midwives took tickets from patients before they were delivered and left them. Without a ticket, a woman could not secure another charity midwife and had to either pay for assistance or give birth without medical attendance.[102] Plebeian women had little agency in these situations. Even if they refused midwives' demands for money or tickets, they often did not receive the care to which they were entitled.

Unlike hospitals, outpatient charities operated over extended areas. Small lying-in charities contained their activities within individual districts of the metropolis, while larger charities operated across vast stretches of the city. Charity governors directed their midwives to reside in different parts of the charity's territory to ensure that all patients were within walking distance of assistance. The governors instituted a host of measures to monitor midwives' movements. The Royal Maternity Charity required its midwives to keep delivery books in which they recorded when they visited patients. Midwives were obligated to obtain the governors' permission before moving, to notify the governors if they were unable to work, and to leave notice of their whereabouts whenever they were away from home. Despite these measures, outpatient charities struggled to maintain control over staff members who were so dispersed. Midwives changed lodgings without notice and faked paperwork to collect more money than was their due.[103] They rid themselves of unwanted charity patients by

[101] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/7, 29 March 1804.
[102] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/10, 28 November 1816.
[103] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/9, 30 July 1812.

pretending not to be at home when summoned or claiming that patients' homes were 'not in [their] beat'.[104]

The midwives of lying-in charities came face-to-face with governors only when they attended committee meetings to collect their pay, request leave, or face disciplinary hearings. Midwives went independently about their charity work, assisted by medical men only in exceptional cases. The governors of outpatient charities had difficulty regulating the moral conduct of midwifery staff who were so seldom under their eye. Like many stereotypes, the stereotype of the drunken midwife contained an element of truth. Outpatients frequently complained of midwives who were 'in liquor'.[105] Several patients of the Royal Maternity Charity alleged that Mrs Turnley had turned up intoxicated at their homes. At the lodgings of one patient, Turnley reportedly 'shoved [the] Landlady backwards, and went out […] and fell down in the street'.[106] The midwives of outpatient charities expressed their agency by skirting regulations and opposing official mandates; however, the agency of midwives often compromised plebeian mothers' access to reliable and competent assistance during the dangers of childbirth. Far from exerting control over their own circumstances, women labouring at home were often at the mercy of midwives.

It is a myth that the home imbued birthing women with power and that the hospitals stifled the agency of poor patients. Agency is not rooted within a space; an environment can be both restrictive and empowering. While subject to rules and surveillance, hospital patients nonetheless resisted medical demands and pursued plebeian childbirth practices. Outpatients were often able to dictate the terms of their lying-in, assisted by attendants who promoted their wishes. Yet, in some circumstances, patients were unable to secure the assistance of overworked and under-regulated midwives and so laboured under conditions that were not of their choosing.

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[104] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/7, 27 December 1804; RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/7, 28 May 1807; RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/10, 30 May 1822.
[105] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/7, 24 November 1803; LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/001, 16 July 1811.
[106] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/10, 31 October 1816.

The Agency of Complaint

The completion of the lying-in period did not typically mark the end of patients' engagement with lying-in charities. The governors expected that patients, once recovered from childbirth, would appear before them to express their gratitude. 'Giving thanks' was not optional. Patients who failed to do so were disqualified from receiving future assistance. However, the thanksgiving ceremony served a dual purpose, for the governors invited patients to voice any dissatisfaction they might have with the treatment they had received. The minute books of lying-in charities reveal that plebeian mothers frequently took advantage of the opportunity to complain. Their success in obtaining redress varied widely and was largely dependent on complainants' ability to mobilise contacts within their working-class community and within the body of charity subscribers. Plebeian families who believed that they could not obtain justice through the charities could exert pressure from the outside.

Inpatients frequently took issue with material standards within the institutions. They alleged that the linen was damp or unclean, that there was not enough light on the wards, or that the food was inadequate. Elizabeth Perkins expected the British Lying-in Hospital not only to provide quality fare, but to cater to her preferences. She complained that 'the Food had not been good enough [and] that she wished for Mutton Chops instead of roast or boiled Veal'.[107] Inpatients and outpatients also criticised their medical attendants, claiming that they had been negligent, unkind, drunken, or incompetent. Plebeian families frequently accused medical staff of injuring or causing the deaths or mothers and babes.

The governors had several responses to complaints. They dismissed some out of hand, including Perkins' grumble about the veal, which they determined had 'originated in the discontented Mind of the Complainant'.[108] While the governors felt obliged to offer patients fresh and nutritious food, it was apparently too great an indulgence to allow charity patients to choose their cuts of meat. The governors also dismissed complaints which did not conform to medical men's understanding of what was beneficial for lying-in women. In 1810 Jane Morgan complained about the practice in the

[107] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/004, 30 July 1802.
[108] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/004, 30 July 1802.

City of London Lying-in Hospital of withholding meat from newly delivered women until their fifth day after delivery, claiming she 'could not do without [meat] so long'.[109] The governors declined to change the hospital diet as the medical men counselled against it. Women rarely complained about being denied spirituous liquors, perhaps because they realised that the governors would not be sympathetic. Instead, they usually echoed the medical beliefs of accoucheurs when framing their complaints. The husband of one Royal Maternity Charity patient, for example, claimed that midwife Mrs Lemeunnie had requested spirits to wash his child's head, a 'useless' custom according to the opinion of medical men.[110] Many plebeian families exercised their agency by aligning themselves with the values of their benefactors.

Hospital governors launched investigations into many complaints. As part of their investigations, they frequently interviewed patients to establish if their experiences tallied with complainants' allegations. Aggrieved women could expect little backing from their fellow patients; the latter frequently sided with hospitals, insisting that complainants' claims were unfounded. In 1829 Charlotte Miller and Ann Heale complained about the state of the linen and staff at the British Lying-in Hospital. The governors called up Mary Hogan and Mary Neale, who had been in the same ward as the complainants. Both women testified that hospital conditions had been more than adequate. Moreover, they stated that they had not heard Miller or Heale complain on the wards, thus suggesting that Miller and Heale had concocted their grievances after the fact.[111] Plebeian women were not a homogenous group whose agency was expressed solely as opposition against authority. Mary Hogan and Mary Neale exercised their agency by defending hospital management and condemning the actions of their peers. Agency did not always assume the form of class conflict.

When complainants' claims were not supported by their fellow patients, hospital governors generally concluded that complainants had manufactured their allegations. When they believed a complainant to be lying, the charity governors blacklisted her and informed the subscriber who had recommended her. The governors of the British Lying-in Hospital wrote to one subscriber that

[109] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/001, 28 August 1810.
[110] Copley, p. 127; RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/9, 28 April 1814.
[111] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/006, 12 June 1829.

complainants usually had 'some ulterior object in view mostly the obtainment of Money from the Governor or Subscriber by attempting to excite compassion on a false detail'.[112] The Royal Maternity Charity hinted at the potential for deception when it declared that 'very few' complaints had been '*justly* made of [midwives'] want of punctuality or good behaviour'.[113]

The governors treated allegations about injuries or deaths seriously. If such allegations were made public, they could severely compromise the reputation of the charities and their medical staff. In some cases, the governors acknowledged the negative outcome, but cleared midwives and accoucheurs of responsibility. They often blamed non-preventable medical conditions or the actions of patients and their attendants for injuries and deaths. In 1821 the midwife Mrs Young was accused of causing the death of a mother. The governors of the Royal Maternity Charity exonerated Mrs Young, insisting that working-class attendants in the birthing room triggered the patient's decline by giving her brandy, contrary to the midwife's instructions.[114]

Having held investigations, charity governors occasionally determined that complaints were justified. The governors reprimanded, fined, or fired midwives, according to the severity and number of their offences. The governors also granted monetary compensation to aggrieved families.[115] There were several ways in which complainants could increase the chances that governors would decide in their favour. Although the above case of Mrs Young and the brandy illustrates that collective agency in the birthing room did not necessarily translate into agency in the committee room, many complaining outpatients were able to capitalise on the support of others. The friends, relatives, and neighbours of outpatients frequently accompanied them to thanksgiving ceremonies. These witnesses offered testimony to shore up complainants' allegations. They also expanded on complainants' evidence, describing events which had occurred away from the bedside. For example, husbands described their difficulty in fetching midwives. In cases where the mother had died or was too ill to attend the committee, her relatives made complaints on her behalf. Working-class supporters lent

[112] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/005, 3 September 1824.
[113] The emphasis is in the original text. *Account of the Lying-in Charity*, p. 13.
[114] RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, GB 1538 S60/A/10, 29 November 1821.
[115] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/001, 16 July 1811.

weight to complainants' claims, rendering it difficult for governors to dismiss them. Agency was compounded as a body of supporters exerted pressure on officials.

Patients who sought redress also drew on the agency of their social superiors. The patient-governor relationship was not the sole gift relationship at play within the lying-in charities; subscribers and charity governors were also linked by ties of mutual obligation. In return for subscribing money to a lying-in charity, a donor claimed the right to recommend a set number of patients each year. Subscribers expected that the women they recommended would be treated well. Unhappy patients often complained to their subscribers about their experiences. Some subscribers appear to have considered it a personal slight when *their* patient received substandard care. They wrote to the charity governors or attended committee meetings, insisting that the governors make inquiries. When one subscriber heard that the British Lying-in Hospital had discharged her recommendee Susan Light when Light had been 'delirious from Fever', she wrote that she was 'anxious to have an explanation of the reasons' for the hospital's action.[116]

Some subscribers used their knowledge of charity hierarchy to ensure that patients' complaints were addressed. In 1820 William Ward, a subscriber to Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital, claimed that Anne Banister had died from improper treatment. He addressed his letter of complaint not to the charity's secretary, but to the Duke of Sussex, the hospital's foremost patron. The Duke requested a 'strict enquiry', which the governors duly carried out.[117] The governors of lying-in charities were anxious to appease their middle- and upper-class supporters, for disgruntled subscribers could take their money elsewhere or speak out against the charities. After the British Lying-in Hospital turned Mary Ann Ashford away for not having a signed letter, the lady who recommended her was 'so much offended, that she placed her subscription to some of the other hospitals'.[118]

It is clear that the patients were more powerful when they combined their moral outrage with the financial and social power of charity subscribers. In 1811 the medical gentlemen of Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital dismissed Phebe Chandler's allegation that the midwife Mrs Barnes had

[116] LMA, British Lying-in Hospital minute book, H14/BLI/A/02/005, 17 April 1818.
[117] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/002, 21 January 1820.
[118] Ashford, p. 67.

attended her while drunk, had demanded money, and had threatened to spread a rumour that Chandler was unmarried. Unhappy with the medical men's decision and convinced that they had 'not settled the matter at all', Chandler wrote to her subscriber who, in turn, wrote to the committee expressing her surprise that Chandler had not received redress. The governors reinvestigated the case. This time they acknowledged Chandler's grievance, awarded her fifteen shillings, and dismissed Mrs Barnes.[119] Chandler harnessed her recommender's agency for her own ends, forcing the charity to take action when it had not been willing to do so for Chandler alone. Agency is fluid and transferable. Along with exercising agency on her own account, the lying-in patient borrowed the agency of others.

Charity governors and medical gentlemen usually presented a united front when facing complaints. Although the governors frequently disciplined midwives, they very rarely investigated medical men for malpractice, much less punished them for it. This may reflect the fact that midwives outnumbered accoucheurs in outpatient charities and that, in both hospital and domiciliary contexts, accoucheurs had much less contact with patients than midwives did. Accoucheurs may also have faced fewer complaints because they were of a higher social class than midwives. Medical men were often elected to their positions by ballot from the subscribers. The governors had to tread carefully in disciplining medical men, lest they offend subscribers who backed them. The governors may have been less likely to credit accusations against professional men whose reputations were bound up with the charities. However, there were cases when complaints caused crises of governance within the charities. In 1830 Mr Allen lodged a complaint with the City of London Lying-in Hospital. He claimed that his wife Jane was partly delivered of a stillborn child in the hospital on a Monday morning, but that Dr Rance had not fully delivered the infant until the Wednesday evening, by which time Jane Allen was in a 'very dangerous state'. The Allens also alleged that medical staff had ruptured Jane's bladder with a catheter.[120] The staff members who had treated Mrs Allen denied responsibility, insisting she had not been under their jurisdiction and that Allen's bladder condition predated her pregnancy. The minute books do not provide a full account of the investigation, yet the case clearly divided the institution. A vote on whether to suspend the matron split the governors. Mr

[119] LMA, Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital minute book, H27/QC/A/06/001, 16 July 1811.
[120] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/007, 9 June 1830.

Howard of the house committee resigned because he believed the hospital's handling of the case was 'highly injudicious'.[121]

The divisions within the hospital compelled the committee to treat the complaint seriously. Although usually reticent to subject medical gentlemen to scrutiny, the governors examined Dr Rance's actions, leading him to resign. The Allens benefitted from the agency of governors who voiced their dissatisfaction at the way in which Jane Allen had been treated in the birthing room and by the committee. Compelled to greater exertion in the wake of Howard's resignation, the committee determined after a month-long investigation that Jane Allen was the victim of neglect. The Allen case, although far from typical, demonstrates that a complaint could have enormous impact. The Allens' complaint compelled the governors to revise hospital policies. They increased staff and reduced the number of beds in each ward, presumably to ensure that no patient would against suffer as Jane Allen had. And yet, as the minute books do not record the Allens' response to the enquiry, the historian can only surmise whether the couple found the process empowering, satisfactory, or just.

If patients or their families believed that the charities would not listen to their complaints, they could voice their dissatisfaction in other contexts. As Lisa Forman Cody argues, the lying-in hospitals were extremely vulnerable to gossip. The lying-in charities were largely closed to public oversight.[122] Denied the opportunity to witness conditions for themselves, the curious public might turn to unreliable reports for information. The charities were particularly susceptible to rumours of a sexual nature. Although male midwives had been practicing since the eighteenth century, many commentators still questioned the propriety of allowing men into the birthing room.[123] In 1813 Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital prosecuted the printer Mr Horncastle for libel. For reasons which are not entirely clear, Horncastle had portrayed the hospital as a 'hot-bed of lust and fornication' in his publication *Saturday Morning*, alleging that staff allowed members of the public to view patients in

[121] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/007, 2 July 1830.
[122] Cody, 'Living and Dying', pp. 325-26.
[123] Walker Keighley, *A New System of Family Medicine, for the Use of Midwives, Mothers, and Nurses: Also, a Complete Treatise on the Management and Diseases of Children* (London: B. Crosby, 1806), pp. 348-49.

labour for sexual gratification.[124] Lying-in charities were also liable to accusations of cruelty and malpractice.

Disgruntled patients expressed their agency by spreading rumours. John Davis spread a report that his wife had died from neglect in the City of London Lying-in Hospital.[125] In 1828 the City of London Lying-in Hospital discharged Sarah Bryant when the matron discovered that her 'pregnancy' was nothing more than carefully arranged padding. The governors later learned that Bryant and her husband 'circulat[ed] malicious Reports' about the hospital.[126] Clearly concerned about the damage these rumours could do, the governors summoned the Bryants to appear before them, but there is no evidence that the couple obeyed.

While patients spread rumours through word of mouth in their own communities, their complaints could reach a wider audience if they captured the attention of prominent men or the press. Mary Walsh was confined in Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital in 1830. She was discharged a few weeks after giving birth, but was soon afterwards admitted into St Thomas' Hospital complaining of pain and a flagging pulse. At St Thomas', Walsh told staff about how she had been treated in the lying-in hospital. She described a series of indignities: walking five miles after her waters had broken because the hospital would admit only patients who were in labour; giving birth on a leather skin that was not changed for five days; and forced to give thanks although barely able to stand. She also claimed that the governors had discharged her even though she was ill. Walsh died in St Thomas' Hospital and a pupil of that institution, motivated perhaps by humanitarian outrage or professional rivalry, detailed this 'Instance of Gross Neglect and Ill Treatment' for *The Lancet*.[127] The hospital responded that the allegations were unfounded, yet the damage to the institution's reputation had already been done.[128] There are further instances of patients making allegations to medical gentlemen.

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[124] Little can be discovered about William Horncastle or his publications. The governors of the hospital claimed that when they questioned Horncastle about his motives for making such allegations, he responded that his paper 'expos[ed] the vices of the higher as well as the lower orders of society'. *Sunday News*, 10 January 1813; Thomas Ryan, *The History of Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital: From Its Foundation in 1752 to the Present Time. With an Account of Its Objects and Present State* (London: Hutchings and Crowsley, 1885), pp. 16-18.
[125] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/006, 30 March 1814.
[126] LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/007, 18 June 1828.
[127] *The Lancet*, 2 January 1830, pp. 486-87.
[128] Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital did not provide any evidence in *The Lancet* to support its assertion that Walsh's allegations were unfounded. No further information about the case can be obtained from hospital records because the minutes do not survive for 1830. *The Lancet*, 13 February 1830, p. 677.

Mrs Pritchard told Dr Granville of the Westminster General Dispensary of her treatment in a London lying-in hospital. She claimed that when she felt contractions the matron told her that it was not her labour. She then went to the toilet where she gave birth and the child 'slipt unperceived into the stool'.[129] Granville repeated Pritchard's tale in print to illustrate the 'ignorance and unskillfulness' of many of the midwives who were in the employment of maternity charities.[130] By relating their experiences (truthfully or otherwise) to medical professionals, patients harnessed the voice, audience, and professional standing of these men to promote their version of events. Plebeian agency could be magnified through the agency of others.

Inquests were another means through which plebeian families registered their grievances with lying-in charities. Inquests were occasionally conducted at the urging of relatives of deceased lying-in patients. In 1818 an inquest was conducted on Mary Ballard, a patient of the Royal Maternity Charity whose death was ascribed to inflammation. The jury wished to censure Dr Ramsbotham in their verdict, for he had attended Ballard only once during her illness. Although the coroner dissuaded the jury from doing so, the newspapers described the inquest, commenting on the jury's opinion of Ramsbotham.[131] In 1823 another inquest concluded that a child had died from suffocation because his mother had not received sufficient assistance during labour. Two midwives of the Newman Street Lying-in Charity had not attended the birth when summoned; one had refused to assist unless she was paid.[132] These inquests did not make recompense for loss of life, yet grieving families may have felt some satisfaction in having their allegations of malpractice confirmed and seeing the charities' reputations publicly tarnished in the press. The power of inquests and the press to damage the reputations of lying-in charities and their medical staff was forcefully illustrated in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In 1838 Thomas Barton, a medical pupil of the British Lying-in Hospital, complained that an inquest had found him responsible for the death of an infant without consulting any medical evidence; the newspapers broadcast the findings of the jury. Barton alleged that the father of the infant

[129] Granville, pp. 202-03.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 12 November 1818; RCOG, Royal Maternity Charity minute book, S60/A/10, 26 November 1818.
[132] *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 March 1823.

had initiated the inquest in order to extort money from him.[133] In 1840 a series of high-profile inquests immersed lying-in charities in negative publicity.[134]

Conclusions

The Spitalfields mother in Reverend Stone's fictional tale has a calculating approach to lying-in relief. She considers the range of choices —both inpatient and outpatient— that are available in the metropolis and settles for the charity that she believes will be most advantageous to her family. Reverend Stone was censorious of the lying-in charities, for he believed they launched infants into a life of dependence, establishing a lifelong addiction to charity. He argued that plebeian women felt entitled to assistance during their confinements. Malthusians particularly blamed the lying-in charities for encouraging irresponsible reproduction among the dependent poor.[135] Harriet Martineau declared that lying-in hospitals were 'the worst [charities] in existence' as they placed 'a premium on population'.[136] Critics of lying-in charities argued that poor women made no provision for childbirth because they expected philanthropists to meet their needs. As one commentator expressed it, lying-in charities allowed women to 'lie-in like cats at the expense of their mistresses'.[137] Feminist historians depict lying-in patients in a very different light. They suggest that poor patients had very little choice about where or how they gave birth. According to this interpretation, plebeian women did not believe they had a right to relief, but felt grateful for any assistance they received and were careful not to jeopardise it by breaking the rules. Although they disagree about how much power plebeian women had, both Stone and feminist historians portray women's agency (or lack of agency) as a stable and unchanging entity.

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[133] *The Standard*, 28 March 1838; The *Standard*, 17 April 1838; *The Lancet*, 28 April 1838, p. 166.
[134] *The Lancet*, 21 November 1840, pp. 315-17; *The Lancet*, 19 December 1840, pp. 431-41.
[135] Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 287-88.
[136] Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy*, 9 vols (London: Charles Fox, 1823-34), III (1834) p. 37. See also *Essays on the Principles of Charitable Institutions: Being an Attempt to Ascertain What Are the Plans Best Adapted to Improve the Physical and Moral Condition of the Lower Orders in England* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836), pp. 173-75.
[137] HCPP, Royal Commission of Inquiry into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws, 1834 (44), p. 87a.

This chapter argues that plebeian agency is a 'dynamic and relational concept' that was much more fluid that either Stone or feminist historians acknowledged.[138] Plebeian women expressed their agency in vastly different ways. Women were not inherently imbued with or lacking in choice. Their ability to pursue their own needs and desires fluctuated according to their social connections, location, and moral character. To overcome structural barriers to choice, some women capitalised on fleeting opportunities, making the most of the uncertain timing of pregnancy to obtain emergency admission into hospital or an extended stay on the wards. Many women returned to the same charities for successive pregnancies, although there is little evidence to support Stone's claim that lying-in charities encouraged reproduction. Plebeian agency did not assume a consistent form in distinct spatial contexts, as historians so often claim. The hospital was not consistently a site of oppression, nor the home necessarily an empowering environment. Hospital regulations prevented some women from acting as they wished, yet other women found ways of circumventing the rules. Many hospital patients found that empowerment lay not in resisting official dictates, but in embracing and enforcing them. In some situations, outpatient charity enabled women to act independently of medical practitioners. However, the unpredictability of childbirth and the pressures on midwifery staff often reduced outpatients to the agentless situation of labouring without medical assistance. As well as fluctuating across spaces, agency flowed between actors. In the birthing room and committee room, plebeian patients capitalised on the agency of their friends and families, charity subscribers, and the press. Beyond the institution, sympathetic medical men and the press were often willing to amplify the voices of charity patients who believed they had been wronged. Binary models of agency fail to acknowledge the complex networks of relationships through which power flowed.

[138] Montenach and Simonton, pp. 4-5.

3. Vaccine Charities

> The child […] introduced into the world is not worse provided for than his parents. Of course he requires *vaccination*, or in case of neglect, he takes the *small-pox*. In either case, he is sent to the '*Hospital for Casual Small-pox and for Vaccination*', and by this means costs his parents nothing.[1]

Having successfully given birth, the Spitalfields mother must see her son through the diseases of childhood. She eagerly makes use of the Fever Hospital, the London Opthalmic Infirmary, and the Welsh Dispensary. However, her single-minded pursuit of medical care lapses when it comes to her (potential) 'neglect' of vaccination against smallpox. She is unconcerned about vaccination despite the fact it is easily obtainable, far more so than other forms of medical charity. Vaccine stations offering free vaccination to the poor were dotted across early nineteenth-century London. Unlike the lying-in charities of the previous chapter, they did not require patients to secure recommendations or meet moral standards, but assisted all who were deemed healthy enough to withstand the procedure. The reason for the Spitalfields mother's neglect may lie in popular distrust of vaccination. There was a common perception that vaccination was ineffective and potentially harmful, a 'pernicious and baneful experiment' conducted on poor victims.[2] Far from flocking to the vaccine stations, many plebeian parents did not get their children immunised or sought out alternative forms of immunisation.

The most basic definition of agency is acting. As shown in the introduction to this dissertation, historians refine this broad definition, suggesting (often implicitly) that agency involves forethought and strategy. The previous chapter illustrates how plebeian women employed a variety of strategies to secure assistance, to skirt official dictates, or to voice their dissatisfaction. Because vaccination was primarily performed on children who were under one year of age, patients exerted very little influence over the process. Plebeian women feature as prominently in this chapter as they do in the last, for it was mothers who assumed the greatest responsibility for the immunisation of children. The medical men who governed vaccine charities characterised women as the antithesis of

[1] William Stone, *Evidence of the Rev. William Stone, Rector of Spitalfields, and Other Witnesses, as to the Operation of Voluntary Charities* ([London?]: [n. pub.], 1833; repr. 1837), p. 15.
[2] R. Squirrell, *Observations Addressed to the Public in General on the Cow-Pox, Shewing that It Originates in Scrophula, Commonly Called the Evil* (London: W. Smith & Son, 1805), p. 1.

deliberating actors. The surgeon James Moore stated that the 'female sex, from superior sensibility and fondness for infants, were wonderfully agitated by Jenner's discovery [of vaccination]. Under this emotion to deliberate was difficult […] They were decided by the firstlings of the head, and hurried to extremes'.[3] Moore appears to refer to women of social standing, for the poor were generally not thought capable of the refinement of 'sensibility'. However, pro-vaccinist medical men like Moore nevertheless suggested that maternal emotions ran high in plebeian women. Mothers were emotional rather than rational, impulsive rather than deliberating. They did not act so much as react. Moreover, charity vaccinators argued that women's emotional attachment to their children blinkered their perspective. This was particularly the case for poor mothers who had little education. According to the charity governors, plebeian women fixated on their immediate circumstances and immediate families and were unconcerned about the future or the interests of the wider population.

Although the charity governors claimed that plebeian women were irrational, poor mothers nonetheless exercised agency. This chapter challenges the notion that agency must involve rational deliberation. The agency of plebeian mothers, and to a lesser degree that of their children, lay largely in what medical men characterised as their emotions and feelings. Vaccinators claimed that the idea of vaccination stimulated emotions (strong or agitated mental states) among plebeian women, namely fear, anger, disgust, grief, and shame. As Joanne Bailey notes, 'feelings' are 'historically specific' and highly gendered.[4] During the early nineteenth century, medical men often viewed feelings in relational terms. To be 'feeling' was to be sympathetic or sensitive towards others. Medical men frequently suggested that a mother's feelings were emotional reactions to her child, whether concern, affection, or tenderness.

Most surviving source material on vaccination in the early nineteenth century was generated by medical practitioners; this study has identified no working-class accounts of vaccination. Given the paucity of sources created by working-class people (and the ephemeral nature of emotions), it is

[3] Contrary to James Moore's belief and that of many nineteenth-century commentators, Edward Jenner did not discover vaccination, but he did develop and promote it as an immunisation technique. James Moore, *The History of the Small Pox* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815), p. 122.
[4] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 20.

difficult for the historian to establish the 'reality' of plebeian emotions. Fay Bound Alberti notes that primary sources are only 'a series of representations *about* emotion' that can allow historians 'to chart and analyse the language used to describe somatic experience', but not to 'access experience itself'.[5] This chapter accesses plebeian emotions through the representations of medical men. These representations of emotions do not necessarily correspond to emotions as plebeians experienced them. Medical men may have misrepresented plebeian feelings. Certainly, their binary conception of emotion/reason was not entirely fair. Inserting matter derived from diseased cows into infants' arms was, after all, an unusual and largely untested procedure in the early years of the nineteenth century. Fear could be an entirely rational response to a procedure that might endanger health and life itself. However, despite the challenges of interpretation, it is clear that vaccination was an emotional issue and that the governors of vaccine charities perceived plebeian emotions as powerful —and dangerous— forces. This chapter, and those that follow, focus much more intently on elite perceptions of plebeian agency than the previous chapter has done. To a large degree, this is because existing sources for the charities in the following chapters are much more heavily weighted towards the elite perspective than that of plebeians.

The chapter begins by tracing the development of vaccine charities and introducing their model of operation. The previous chapter demonstrates how plebeian women voiced their discontent with lying-in hospitals by spreading rumours. The second section of this chapter expands on the theme of rumour, exploring how plebeian parents were both consumers of and producers of emotionally charged information about vaccination. It might be argued that vaccination propaganda exploited plebeian women and reduced their agency; however, as agents of rumour, plebeian women represented a powerful challenge to the operations of vaccine charities. Many medical men were willing to accommodate plebeian women's demands, however irrational they believed the demands to be, if doing so halted the spread of rumours and relieved the anxieties that rumours cultivated.

The previous chapter illustrates how poor women exercised their choice in their pursuit of lying-in relief. Within London's vast medical marketplace, plebeian mothers also had considerable

[5] Fay Bound Alberti, 'Introduction: Emotion Theory and Medical History', in *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950*, ed. by Fay Bound Alberti (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. xiii-xxviii (pp. xvi, xvii).

scope to pursue their own desires with respect to immunisation. The governors of lying-in charities were largely unconcerned about plebeian women's choices, or at worst were annoyed when plebeian choices compromised the efficiency of their organisations. By contrast, the governors of vaccine charities were extremely worried about plebeian mothers' choices. They believed that mothers' personal choices about vaccination could pose a very public threat. If unwilling to submit their children to vaccination, mothers could seek out variolation (an older form of immunisation) or leave their offspring unprotected against smallpox. The governors of vaccine charities condemned such choices, for they were convinced that unimmunised or variolated children were agents of infection who spread smallpox across England. The third section of the chapter explores the agency of infection. Some charity governors argued that plebeian women were too emotional and ill-informed to make good decisions for their children. Frustrated by what they perceived as a foolish prejudice against vaccination and concerned to protect the population from disease, some medical men acted *in loco parentis* and coerced or tricked mothers into vaccination. The governors of some vaccine charities attempted to restrict access to variolation (discussed below), arguing that parents' right to make medical decisions for their children could not come at the cost of public safety. However, such attempts to check maternal choice were not entirely effective.

Experimentation was a key aspect of the vaccine charities' operations, yet it too was an emotive issue. Just as there was a popular belief that the lying-in hospitals performed dangerous experiments on women, so was there fear that the medical men of vaccine charities used poor children as human guinea pigs. The fourth section of the chapter, which focuses on the agency of consent, explores the debates between medical men on the ethics of clinical experimentation. A nascent medical discourse bolstered the agency of plebeian people, for it emphasised patients' rights to humane treatment and the importance of respecting the feelings of the poor. Moreover, debate within medical circles about experimentation acknowledged the agency of plebeian doubt and fear. The final section of the chapter is concerned with the agency of sensation. It examines the poor's reactions to the performance of vaccination, a procedure that elicited strong sensations of pain and anxiety in patients (and their mothers) and that was often sensational in its appearance. The section expands on the themes in preceding sections, illustrating how plebeian women exercised their choice, patronising

only those charities that met with their approval, and how a discourse on medical ethics lent some force to plebeian interests.

Historical Context

The vaccine charities established at the turn of the nineteenth century built on the precedent of charities for variolating the poor. First introduced to Britain in the early eighteenth century, variolation is the practice of inoculating with smallpox matter. Eighteenth-century philanthropists argued that it was humanitarian to protect the poor from smallpox. Much like the founders of the lying-in hospitals, they emphasised the importance of preserving the population for the demands of a wartime economy.[6] The Small Pox and Inoculation Hospital (est. 1746) treated smallpox patients and offered free variolation to the poor.[7] The Society for the Inoculation of the Poor at Their Own Homes (1776) was essentially a dispensary specialising in variolation. There was opposition to the practice of variolation during the eighteenth century, with some people arguing that the procedure challenged divine providence. Nevertheless, by the end of the eighteenth century, variolation had become a widely accepted practice, an achievement that historian Maisie May attributes largely to the variolation charities.[8]

However, variolation was far from a perfect solution to smallpox. Despite the efforts of the variolation charities to tackle smallpox during the eighteenth century, by the end of the century the disease continued to kill hundreds of Londoners each year. Although variolation typically provoked only a mild case of smallpox, it occasionally produced a severe form of the disease that could be disfiguring or fatal. Moreover, patients could transmit smallpox for several days following variolation. This was a concern for outpatient charities because they did not isolate their patients. Critics of outpatient variolation charities argued that the institutions were counterproductive, increasing rather

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[6] Maisie May, 'Inoculating the Urban Poor in the Late Eighteenth Century', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 30 (1997), 291-305 (pp. 300-01); Deborah Christian Brunton, 'Pox Britannica: Smallpox Inoculation in Britain, 1721-1830' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), pp. 153-57; Andrea A. Rusnock, *Vital Accounts: Quantifying Health in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 95.

[7] The hospital was initially located on Windmill Street, Tottenham Court Road. It moved to a site at St Pancras in 1793.

[8] May, 'Inoculating the Urban Poor', pp. 301-02.

than reducing smallpox by allowing their free-ranging outpatients to spread contagion.[9] In 1796 —a year in which the bills of mortality attributed 3548 deaths in London to smallpox— Edward Jenner began experimenting with vaccination, an immunisation method that used cowpox matter instead of live smallpox matter.[10] As the cowpox disease is related to smallpox, infection with the former can secure immunity to the latter. Cowpox is a milder disease than smallpox and, as such, vaccination is safer than variolation, carrying little risk of fatality. Another advantage of vaccination was that it did not render patients contagious. Outpatients could be vaccinated without concern that they would transmit smallpox. Medical men in the early nineteenth century called vaccination by many different names: cowpox inoculation, vaccine inoculation, cowpoxing, and even vacciolation.[11] Variolation was also known as smallpox inoculation, variolous inoculation, or simply as inoculation. To avoid confusion, 'variolation' in this chapter refers to inoculation with smallpox matter and 'vaccination' to inoculation with cowpox matter.

The physicians William Woodville and George Pearson conducted trials of vaccination at the Small Pox Hospital in 1799. From 1800 the hospital offered free vaccination. Medical men raced to make a name for themselves in vaccination at the turn of the nineteenth century. Eager to establish himself as a vaccine pioneer, Dr Pearson founded the Original Vaccine Pock Institution in late 1799. The charity vaccinated the poor; however, this was not its primary aim. It was concerned foremost to contribute to medical knowledge and cultivate supplies of vaccine lymph.[12] The location of the Original Vaccine Pock Institution in the affluent West End reflected the charity's priorities.

Concerned that Pearson claimed undue credit for developing vaccination, Jenner and his supporters founded the Royal Jennerian Society for the Extermination of the Small Pox in 1803, opening a Central House at Salisbury Square. In contrast to the Original Vaccine Pock Institution, the

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[9] See T. Dimsdale, *Observations on the Introduction to the Plan of the Dispensary for General Inoculation* (London: William Richardson, 1778); Brunton, 'Pox Britannica', pp. 158-62.

[10] There was a smallpox epidemic in London in 1796. According to the general bill of mortality, the only conditions which were more fatal than smallpox in 1796 were consumption (4265 deaths) and convulsions (3768 deaths). Smallpox killed hundreds of Londoners each year even when there was not an epidemic. *The Monthly Magazine*, December 1797, pp. 478-79.

[11] Andrea Rusnock, 'Catching Cowpox: The Early Spread of Smallpox Vaccination, 1798-1810', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 83 (2009), 17-36 (p. 24).

[12] *A Paper, Containing the Results of Eleven Years Practice at the Original Vaccine-Pock Institution, No. 44, Broad Street, Golden Square, Read at a Meeting of the Governors and Friends of That Establishment* (London: Henry Reynell, 1811), p. 6.

Royal Jennerian Society ventured into poorer districts. The society established twelve vaccine stations across the metropolis to which the poor could apply for vaccination. Jenner was President of the society's medical council and its secretary and head vaccinator was John Walker, an eccentric doctor with an abrasive manner. Walker refused to follow Jenner's strict vaccination technique. In 1806 Jenner and Walker clashed over the issue and Walker was eventually forced out of the society. Indignant, Walker responded by immediately founding the London Vaccine Institution for Inoculating and Supplying Matter.[13] Walker set up headquarters in the passage leading to Salisbury Square, from which he ambushed mothers bringing their infants to the Central House of the Royal Jennerian Society.[14]

The Royal Jennerian Society suffered financially in the wake of Walker's forced resignation. Many of the charity's supporters transferred their loyalty to the London Vaccine Institution and Walker's public denunciations of the Jennerian Society did nothing for its reputation. The crisis also coincided with a period of great anti-vaccination activity. Anti-vaccinists, many of them medical men, argued that vaccination was harmful and ineffective against smallpox. Anti-vaccination propaganda maligned the vaccine charities. Public opposition to vaccination grew and the number of patients applying at the Royal Jennerian Society fell off dramatically. Conscious that their organisation was in decline, some members of the Royal Jennerian Society joined with the MP George Rose in calling for the establishment of a government vaccine institution. They were hopeful that parliamentary backing of vaccination would inspire public confidence in the new procedure. Government had the authority that the vaccine charities, warring against the anti-vaccinists and amongst themselves, sorely lacked.

Walker objected to a government vaccine institution. He argued that the public would not subscribe to vaccine charities if a government-funded body existed for the same purpose, although lingering animosity toward members of the Royal Jennerian Society may also have contributed to his opposition.[15] Despite Walker's disapproval, the National Vaccine Establishment was founded in 1808. While the government provided healthcare to the army and navy, it was unprecedented for it to

[13] 'Inoculating' here refers to vaccination.
[14] WL, Royal Jennerian Society minute book, MS 4304, 14 October 1806.
[15] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, 1833 (753), XVI.149, p. 88; *Paper, Containing the Results*, p. 7.

involve itself directly in medical provision for the general population. Parliament's willingness to become involved may reflect the seriousness of smallpox. At a time when other European nations were introducing vaccination legislation, the British government was likely anxious not to lag behind in promoting a procedure that had been developed on its shores.[16] For some commentators, it was shameful that smallpox persisted in London when there were reports that the disease had been nearly eradicated in other parts of the world.[17] The Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons jointly managed the National Vaccine Establishment. Many of the men who had been involved in the Royal Jennerian Society became directors of the new government institution. Its income was derived from the Treasury and not from public subscriptions, yet in other respects the National Vaccine Establishment was akin to a vaccine charity. The National Vaccine Establishment vaccinated the poor, distributed lymph, and investigated reputed cases of vaccine failures, just as the Jennerian Society did. Having been effectively replaced, the Royal Jennerian Society was dissolved in 1809. Four years later, attempting to capitalise on Jenner's reputation, John Walker 'revived' the Royal Jennerian Society and merged it with his London Vaccine Institution. Members of the original Royal Jennerian condemned Walker's copycat society as a 'bastard' institution.[18]

As Ruth Richardson explains, medical men used charities to 'draw attention to themselves, their piety, and their charitable generosity, in order to ingratiate themselves with local social elites, and thereby boost their income from private practice'.[19] Charity vaccinators, many of whom had private practices, saw the charities as a means of professional advancement. Vaccine charities provided the experimental subjects that medical practitioners needed in order to develop vaccination theories and techniques. Medical men listed their charity positions on their publications, perhaps because such affiliations with charities lent weight to their findings. Vaccine charities also supplied lymph, a vital resource for medical practitioners. Vesicles formed where vaccine matter was inserted into patients'

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[16] Derrick Baxby, 'The Jenner Bicentenary: The Introduction and Early Distribution of Smallpox Vaccine', *FEMS Immunology and Medical Microbiology*, 16 (1996), 1-10 (p. 9); E.P. Hennock, 'Vaccination Policy against Smallpox, 1835-1914: A Comparison of England with Prussia and Imperial Germany', *Social History of Medicine*, 11 (1998), 49-71 (p. 51).
[17] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1804, p. 214.
[18] To avoid confusion, the 'Royal Jennerian Society; in this chapter refers to the charity that was established in 1803. John Ring, *A Caution against Vaccine Swindlers, and Imposters* (London: S. Gosnell, 1816), p. 24.
[19] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 43.

skin. A week or so after vaccination, vaccinators extracted lymph (cowpox matter) from the vesicles so that it could be used to vaccinate other patients. This arm-to-arm vaccination technique relied on an 'uninterrupted succession' of patients.[20] George Gregory, physician to the Small Pox Hospital, estimated that a medical practice needed to vaccinate at least five hundred children each year in order to collect enough lymph for its own needs.[21] Many private practitioners and institutions did not have large enough clienteles to maintain their own stocks, so they depended on outside sources for lymph.

London was home to one million people at the turn of the nineteenth century. This enormous population (by the standards of the day) made London the best place in Britain for the production of lymph. London vaccine charities, some of which vaccinated thousands of patients each year, were often capable of collecting enough lymph for their own needs and generating a surplus. Dublin, the second most populous city in the United Kingdom with 182,000 inhabitants, simply could not compete with London.[22] On more than one occasion the Dublin Vaccine Institution and Dublin Vaccine Board ran out of lymph because they had too few patients.[23] Vaccine charities in London sent surplus lymph to medical practitioners, medical suppliers, and institutions throughout the world.

While the Royal Jennerian Society and National Vaccine Establishment distributed lymph for free, some charities used lymph to generate income. The Original Vaccine Pock Institution charged half a guinea for a single charge of lymph or a guinea for a year's unlimited supply.[24] By the early 1830s both the Small Pox Hospital and the London Vaccine Institution would only give lymph to those who subscribed to the charity.[25] Lymph enabled charity vaccinators to forge professional links with fellow medical men. Repeated requests for lymph created ties of obligation between charity vaccinators and their clients. Many private practitioners were particular about where they got their lymph, believing that the technique used to collect lymph (which varied across charities) affected the

[20] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, p. ix.
[21] *The London Medical Gazette*, 3 May 1828, p. 657.
[22] Dublin had 182,000 inhabitants in 1804. Jeremy Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain, 1688-1783*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 117.
[23] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. 12, 20, 66.
[24] *Paper, Containing the Results*, p. 32
[25] The London Vaccine Institution offered free lymph until 1830, when it began supplying lymph only to subscribers in an attempt to boost the charity's falling income. HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. 79, 105.

potency of cowpox matter. Charity vaccinators boasted that demand for their lymph was proof of the superior regard in which their methods were held. The reports of the London Vaccine Institution reproduced dozens of letters from clients thanking Walker for supplying them with matter and praising the quality of the lymph.[26]

Lymph from charities was a boon for private medical men and suppliers. Charity lymph enabled medical practitioners to vaccinate without subjecting private patients to the painful and scarring process of lymph extraction. Some medical practitioners charged to vaccinate private patients with lymph from vaccine charities and even those practitioners who offered free vaccination hoped to boost their income by selling medicines on the side or by securing vaccinated infants as lifelong paying patients.[27] Medical suppliers obtained lymph from charities and sold it on for a profit.[28] The governing boards and subscription lists of vaccine charities reflected the dominance of medical interests within the institutions. Medical men filled many of the management roles. Medical practitioners and suppliers comprised a much larger percentage of the subscriber base in vaccine charities than they did in inpatient hospitals. The recommendation systems employed in hospitals ensured sustained interest from middle- and upper-class Londoners who wished to secure medical assistance for servants and employees. Many Londoners may not have been interested in supporting vaccination, for it was much more straightforward and inexpensive than an extended stay in hospital. A master or mistress need only pay a private practitioner a small sum to have an employee vaccinated. Following the foundation of the National Vaccine Establishment, wealthy Londoners may not have seen the merit in subscribing to a vaccine charity when a government-funded institution performed the same functions. The Original Vaccine Pock Institution was almost wholly financed by physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries, 'with little assistance from the public at large'.[29] In 1833 John Epps of the London Vaccine Institution bragged that nearly all the wholesale chemists in London subscribed to the

[26] See for example *London Vaccine Institution for Inoculating and Supplying Matter, Patronised by His Majesty's Ministers, Members of Both Houses of Parliament, the Honourable The East India Company, and the Corporation of the City of London* (London: John Westley, 1831), pp. 10-31.
[27] *The Lancet*, 9 July 1831, p. 473.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *Paper, Containing the Results*, p. 7.

charity, along with 210 medical men in the city and a host of workhouses and charitable institutions.[30] There is some indication that the subscription lists were increasingly dominated by men with medical interests as the nineteenth century progressed. The governors of the London Vaccine Institution noted in 1830 that many members of the nobility and gentry who had subscribed in the institution's early days had died and that their successors were not inclined to support vaccination. The governors claimed that this was because the younger generation (unlike their forebears) had not experienced the horror of smallpox, vaccination having largely suppressed the disease among the richer classes.[31] To many wealthy Londoners, extending aid to pregnant women may have seemed a much more obvious and worthwhile cause than protecting the poor from an unfamiliar disease.

There was some concern among medical men at the vaccine charities' involvement in the medical marketplace. Dr John Ring criticised the 'mercenary' Small Pox Hospital and Original Vaccine Pock Institution for reaping a 'golden harvest' from the sale of lymph.[32] Some independent medical practitioners complained that vaccine charities unfairly restricted their access to cowpox matter.[33] Nevertheless, if they were to survive, vaccine charities had to serve vested medical interests. There is little evidence that plebeian parents objected to the sale of their children's lymph. This may be because parents were not aware of the scale of the lymph trade. Vaccinators informed parents that lymph extracted from their infants would be used to vaccinate others and mothers observed the arm-to-arm vaccination procedure at vaccine stations. However, parents may not have been aware that much of the lymph collected by the charities was not destined to be used in-house, but would be distributed to medical practitioners and medical suppliers throughout Britain and overseas.

With the exception of the research-focused Original Vaccine Pock Institution, which vaccinated several hundred patients each year until it closed in 1826, the vaccine charities aimed to

[30] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, p. 79.
[31] Ibid., p. 153.
[32] Ring, *Caution against Vaccine Swindlers*, pp. 4, 34.
[33] Access to lymph was a contentious issue. In the early 1830s the government considered closing the National Vaccine Establishment. Some medical practitioners opposed the idea, arguing that vaccine charities were unable or unwilling to supply private practitioners with sufficient lymph. *The Lancet*, 9 July 1831, pp. 530-31; *The Lancet*, 10 November 1838, pp. 279-80; *The Lancet*, 15 December 1838, p. 452.

process large numbers of patients.[34] Vaccine stations gathered patients together, enabling vaccinators to move smoothly from one patient to the next. Some charities considered conducting house-to-house vaccination. Surviving minute books do not detail why such schemes were never implemented, but the explanation may be that domiciliary visits were not an efficient way of vaccinating on a mass scale. In 1832 the London Vaccine Institution vaccinated 5641 patients and the National Vaccine Establishment 14,190 patients. The Small Pox Hospital vaccinated 3701 patients in 1832.[35] Some general dispensaries, workhouses, and charitable institutions also offered vaccination, but on a much smaller scale than the vaccine charities.

Faced with an insatiable demand for lymph, vaccine charities dispensed with recommendations and moral standards that limited patient numbers.[36] Vaccine charities only turned away people who were too young or unhealthy to tolerate vaccination. Despite their eagerness to vaccinate all, the vaccine charities were not used in equal measure by plebeian Londoners. The charities' clientele consisted principally of the 'children of tradespeople, of the least opulent of the middle class of society, and of the upper class of workmen'.[37] The most indigent inhabitants of the metropolis did not patronise the vaccine charities in large numbers. Medical men claimed that destitution made the poorest Londoners apathetic towards vaccination.[38] Securing survival in the present, rather than protection for the future, was their priority. Vaccinators also claimed that destitute people were likely to believe anti-vaccination arguments because they were poorly educated. Some observers suggested that paupers were relieved when smallpox carried off a child and so reduced the number of hungry mouths to feed.[39] According to some reports, the Irish inhabitants of slum districts were particularly dismissive of the vaccine charities. The reports do not explain why this was so, although Catholics may have had religious scruples about vaccination.[40]

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[34] Falling subscriptions forced the Original Vaccine Institution to close in 1826. HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, p. 47.
[35] Ibid., p. vii.
[36] Brunton, 'Pox Britannica', p. 203.
[37] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. x, 53.
[38] Ibid., p. 118.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Dr Richard Baron Howard, a physician in Manchester, similarly noted that the Irish displayed an 'indifference' to vaccination. It may be that the attitude of the Irish towards vaccination had more to do with their poverty than their Irish identity. Irish immigrants comprised a large proportion of the inhabitants of slum districts like St Giles. It is also possible that the medical men who reported Irish 'indifference' to vaccination

In plebeian families fathers and mothers alike made decisions about the immunisation of children. Tracts designed to promote vaccination among the lower orders addressed both parents.[41] One fictional moral tract features two fathers who discuss vaccination amongst themselves, suggesting that men played a role in vaccination decisions.[42] Both fathers and mothers gave (and refused) consent to vaccination.[43] Medical men observed that 'parents' in general held certain beliefs about vaccination. However, medical men fixated on plebeian women. Their writings mention mothers far more frequently than they do fathers. This may reflect the fact that charity vaccinators had the greatest amount of interaction with mothers. If fathers had some input into whether or not their child was vaccinated, it was mothers who generally put choices into action. As Michael Bennett shows, mothers were responsible for the practical accomplishment of vaccination.[44] Mothers carried their infants, usually on foot, to the vaccine charities. They oversaw medical procedures, holding their children and catching blood in their handkerchiefs.[45] Medical treatises indicate that mothers nursed their children through vaccination, carefully monitoring them. Mothers noted and interpreted symptoms and reported their observations to medical practitioners and neighbours.[46] Mothers may have taken a more hands-on role than men because the practical care of infants was considered a maternal duty. Some medical men also suggested that a mother's natural instincts ―her 'sympathizing affection, anxious and maternal solicitude'― compelled her to take charge of her children's health.[47] Vaccinators praised parents who

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were prejudiced. Samuel Plumbe, *A Popular and Impartial Estimate of the Present Value of Vaccination, as a Security against Small Pox, and of the Danger of Encouraging or Tolerating the Inoculation of the Latter* (London: T. Cadell, 1830), pp. 71-72; HCPP, Seventh Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1841 (327), XI.291, pp. 89-90.

[41] Michael Bennett, 'Jenner's Ladies: Women and Vaccination against Smallpox in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History*, 93 (2008), 497-513 (p. 511); John Coakley Lettsom, *An Address, to Parents and Guardians of Children, and Others on Variolous and Vaccine Inoculations* (London: J. Nichols and Son, 1803).

[42] *A Cottage Dialogue on Vaccination; Between Daniel Doubtful and Samuel Sensible* (London: G. Youngman, [1830?]).

[43] See for example John Ring, *A Treatise on the Cow-Pox; Containing the History of Vaccine Inoculation, and an Account of the Various Publications on That Subject, in Great Britain, and Other Parts of the World*, 2 vols (London: Philanthropic Society, 1803), II, pp. 558, 650.

[44] Bennett, 'Jenner's Ladies', p. 511.

[45] *The Lancet*, 29 September 1833, p. 21; John Epps, *The Life of John Walker, M.D., Graduate of the University of Leyden; Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians of London; and Late Director of the Royal Jennerian and London Vaccine Institutions* (London: Whittaker and Treacher, 1831), pp. 120-21.

[46] See for example *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, May 1827, pp. 405, 410; Plumbe, p. 60.

[47] John Marshall, *A Popular Summary of Vaccination, with Reference to Its Efficacy, and Probable Causes of Failure; as Suggested by Extensive Practical Experience* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1830), p. 41.

showed concern for their infants. As Joanne Bailey notes, 'to be anxious was […] a badge of sensitivity and refinement in the latter Georgian period, and thus a trait of good parenting'.[48] Despite this, many medical men feared that emotional attachments clouded rational judgment. Medical men may have focused primarily on plebeian women because of their gendered assumptions. Because women were thought to be particularly prone to emotional and irrational behaviour, vaccinators may have believed that they best illustrated the absurdity of anti-vaccination fears. This chapter engages primarily with plebeian women, for it draws most of its evidence from the texts written by medical men, the most abundant and most detailed sources on early vaccination. Emotional aspects of fathers' engagement with vaccination rarely feature in medical publications and, as such, lie largely beyond historians' grasp.

The Agency of Rumour

The founders of vaccine charities hoped that parents who were already accustomed to variolation would switch to vaccination on realising that vaccination was the safer procedure. However, the founders did not anticipate the degree of 'prejudice' that developed against vaccination in the early nineteenth century. Advocates of vaccination blamed anti-vaccinists for turning the poor against the new procedure. They alleged that the anti-vaccinists, many of whom were medical men, spread misinformation about vaccination to protect the income they obtained from variolating patients and treating smallpox cases.[49] In 1807 the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons surveyed hundreds of medical practitioners, requesting them to explain the causes of public opposition. Many London-based respondents singled out the man-midwife William Rowley and his 1805 publication, *Cow-Pox Inoculation No Security against Small-Pox Infection*.[50] Rowley's text listed dozens of cases of patients who had died or had developed bestial diseases as a result of vaccination. Most of the patients who featured in the publication were from working-class families and many had been

[48] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 39.
[49] Medical men could earn more money through variolation than vaccination. As variolation produced severer symptoms than vaccination, the variolated patient required more medicines and medical attendance, for which medical practitioners could charge. *The Edinburgh Review*, January 1810, p. 328.
[50] William Rowley, *Cow-Pox Inoculation No Security against Small-Pox Infection* (London: J. Barfield, 1805).

vaccinated at vaccine charities. Rowley claimed that enormous tumours grew on the face of Frederick Joules, the 'cow-poxed, ox-faced boy', following vaccination at the Small Pox Hospital (Fig. 1).[51] The 'mangy girl' Marianne Lewis was also vaccinated at the hospital and allegedly developed bovine mange, abscesses, and ulcers (Fig. 2).[52]

Figs 1 and 2 Illustrations of Frederick Joules and Marianne Lewis, from William Rowley's *Cow-Pox Inoculation No Security against Small-Pox Infection* (1805), courtesy of the Wellcome Library

Anti-vaccinists directed many of their arguments at fellow medical practitioners. Rowley gave lectures before audiences of physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, and medical students, exhibiting Frederick Joules and Marianne Lewis alongside other 'cow-pox disasters'.[53] A pamphlet war erupted as pro- and anti-vaccinists argued over the intricacies of individual cases. For a reader with no medical training —indeed for anyone not personally embroiled in the debate— it would have been difficult to follow the arguments in many of these texts. However, while anti-vaccinists engaged with

[51] Ibid., p. 42.
[52] Ibid., pp. 46-47.
[53] Robert John Thornton, *Vaccinæ Vindicia; or, Defence of Vaccination: Containing a Refutation of the Cases, and Reasonings on the Same, in Dr Rowley's and Dr Moseley's Late Extraordinary Pamphlets against Vaccination* (London: H.D. Symonds, 1806), pp. 323-26.

their peers, they did not ignore the lower reaches of the social scale. The anti-vaccinists conducted a mass publicity campaign to discredit vaccination. The surgeon John Birch had placards describing the 'Fatal Effects of Cow-Pox' posted on walls along London's busiest thoroughfares.[54] Birch also reportedly hired an errand cart to distribute cheap anti-vaccination tracts.[55] Rowley had prints made depicting Frederick Joules and Marianne Lewis as half-cow, half-human freaks. The prints were displayed in print-shop windows, where the poor could freely view them (Figs 1 and 2).[56]Anti-vaccinists placed notices in the newspapers describing cases where vaccination had failed disastrously.[57] They also spread their message through word of mouth. On hearing that a vaccinated patient had developed adverse symptoms, anti-vaccinists descended on the patient's home and attempted to convince parents and neighbours that vaccination was to blame.[58] Perverting the efforts of the vaccine charities, anti-vaccinists offered to variolate the poor gratis and founded an Anti-Vaccinarian Society to suppress vaccination.[59]

The vaccine charities waded into the contest for public opinion, matching the tactics of the anti-vaccinists. The Royal Jennerian Society hung placards in station houses, churches, and schools across the city.[60] Some of the placards carried the request 'that this Paper may not be defaced' —an indication of the strength of public sentiment against vaccination.[61] Charity vaccinators visited patients whom vaccination had allegedly harmed and made their own diagnoses. Advocates of vaccination rebutted the arguments of anti-vaccinists in the newspapers. Noticing that plebeian

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[54] *The Monthly Repertory of English Literature*, January 1811, p. 156.
[55] William Blair, *Hints for the Consideration of Parliament, in a Letter to Dr Jenner, on the Supposed Failures of Vaccination at Ringwood* (London: J. Callow, 1808), p. iv.
[56] For more information on anti-vaccination prints see Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 235-44. Robert Willan, *On Vaccine Inoculation* (London: Richard Phillips, 1806), p. 85; Joseph Adams, *A Popular View of Vaccine Inoculation, with the Practical Mode of Conducting It. Shewing the Analogy between the Small Pox and Cow Pox, and the Advantages of the Latter* (London: Richard Phillips, 1807), p. 143; *Letters to Dr Rowley, on His Late Pamphlet, Entitled* Cow-Pox Inoculation, No Security against Small-Pox Infection (London: J. Norris, 1805), pp. 5-6, 37.
[57] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1804, p. 1114; *The Report on the Cow-Pock Inoculation, from the Practice at the Vaccine-Pock Institution, during the Years 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: Henry Reynell, 1803), pp. 36-37.
[58] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, October 1805, p. 361.
[59] John Ring, *An Answer to Dr Moseley, Containing a Defence of Vaccination* (London: J. Murray, 1805), pp. 278-79; Thornton, pp. 170-71.
[60] John Birch, *Serious Reasons for Uniformly Objecting to the Practice of Vaccination: In Answer to the Report of the Jennerian Society, &c.* (London: J. Smeeton, 1806), p. 28; Rowley, p. 21.
[61] WL, Royal Jennerian Society minute book, MS 4304, 14 April 1803.

Londoners were more trusting of religious leaders than medical practitioners, vaccine charities enlisted clergymen to promote vaccination from the pulpit and in print.[62] The Royal Jennerian Society instructed its vaccine station to distribute *An Address from a Country Minister to His Parishioners, on the Subject of the Cow-Pox*, a tract penned by curate Thomas Warren.[63]

Anti-vaccination propaganda was intended to provoke strong emotional reactions in readers. Graphic descriptions and illustrations of symptoms invited disgust and horror.[64] Anti-vaccinists also dwelled on the emotional costs of vaccination. They claimed that the suffering of vaccinated infants drove their parents to distraction. According to Rowley, the mother of a child who died following vaccination at the Royal Jennerian Society 'cr[ied] grievously in a flood of tears, and sp[oke] the most bitter invectives against cow-pox inoculation'.[65] Letters, ostensibly penned by grieving parents, appeared in anti-vaccination publications; the writers detailed their remorse at having allowed their children to be vaccinated.[66] The vaccine charities combatted such emotional arguments with emotional arguments of their own. In tracts addressed to parents, they described the horrors of smallpox and alluded to the guilt and grief which readers would feel if they neglected vaccination and allowed their children to succumb to the disease.[67]

Pro-vaccinists claimed that anti-vaccinists abused plebeian families. The parents of Frederick Joules were reportedly angry that Rowley made an 'exhibition' of their boy and broke his promise to contribute towards Frederick's medical costs.[68] Pro-vaccinists alleged that anti-vaccinists duped poor mothers, playing on their emotions to compel them to reject a procedure that was in their best interests. In return, anti-vaccinists argued that pro-vaccinists mistreated the poor by restricting their

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[62] *Address of the Royal Jennerian Society, for the Extermination of the Small-Pox, with the Plan, Regulations, and Instructions for Vaccine Inoculation* (London: W. Phillips, 1803), pp. 53-55; Lettsom, *Address to Parents*, p. 7.
[63] WL, Royal Jennerian Society minute book, MS 4304, 15 December 1803; Thomas Alston Warren, *An Address from a Country Minister to His Parishioners, on the Subject of the Cow-Pox, or, Vaccine Inoculation* (London: Messrs Rivington, 1803).
[64] One pro-vaccinist claimed that Rowley's prints 'str[uck] with commanding hand, all the strings of parental fondness and maternal partiality. What mother, possessed of common sensibility, would, after such a scene [as that represented in the prints], venture to entrust her darling child to so disastrous and fatal an experiment as vaccination'. *Letters to Dr Rowley*, p. 6.
[65] Rowley, p. 58.
[66] Pro-vaccinists accused anti-vaccinists of writing or dictating the letters. *The Medical Observer*, July 1808, pp. 139-40; Thornton, p. 362, p. 384.
[67] Warren, p. 20; Lettsom, *Address to Parents*, p. 4.
[68] Thornton, p. 295-96; Moore, p. 45.

access to information about the effects of vaccination and by forcing vaccination on them. One might argue that pro- and anti-vaccination campaigns exploited the poor. Both sides failed to acknowledge the wishes of poor parents and they used the names, likenesses, and bodies of poor infants in their publicity campaigns, often against the wishes of parents. Pro- and anti-vaccination propaganda manipulated the poor, deceiving them and compelling them to act in ways that might not align with their beliefs. Exploitation suppresses agency.

However, plebeian parents retained the power to choose between competing vaccination arguments. Both sides of the vaccination debate recognised this and consequently made such concerted efforts to win over plebeian Londoners. Moreover, pro- and anti-vaccinists realised that working-class mothers were not only consumers of anti-vaccination rumours; they also created and propagated them. Far from relying wholly on propaganda for information, many mothers formulated their own opinions about vaccination. They monitored and diagnosed their children's conditions, occasionally attributing symptoms to vaccination. In May 1805 several medical men gathered at the home of a patient who had developed pocks fifteen months after vaccination. They were divided in opinion. Some of the men believed that the child had smallpox and thus concluded that vaccination had failed, while others claimed that the infant had chickenpox.[69] The patient's mother was not a silent observer of the discussion:

> The woman […] insisted that the present eruption was not the chicken-pox, which she said had watery heads, and would die away before the sixth day into scabs. She did not know that the child had gone through the chicken-pox [before], but the small-pox had been in the neighbourhood, two children lying dead of it, and also two others expected to die.[70]

Having nursed her child, the mother had noted the appearance and duration of symptoms and she possessed information about the child's past illnesses.[71] She also knew about diseases among her neighbours. The mother may have felt that her first-hand knowledge made her an expert on her child's

[69] Medical men often had difficulty distinguishing between smallpox and chickenpox because symptoms of the two diseases can appear similar.
[70] John Thomson, *Historical Sketch of the Opinions Entertained by Medical Men Respecting the Varieties and the Secondary Occurrence of Small-Pox* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822), p. 189.
[71] The child's medical history was important in this case because chickenpox can usually only be contracted once. If the child had had chickenpox previously, this would have ruled out chickenpox as a cause of his symptoms.

health. Indeed, she 'insisted' on her interpretation of her child's symptoms, even when faced with a panel of professional gentlemen. Like the plebeian women who crowded around lying-in outpatients, poor mothers confidently asserted their own medical knowledge.

The medical opinions of plebeian mothers were problematic for vaccinators. The previous chapter has shown that the accoucheurs of lying-in charities relied on women to supply information about their pregnancies. Vaccinators likewise needed plebeian mothers to describe symptoms, but they claimed that working-class women lacked the medical acumen to accurately interpret them. Whereas a lying-in mother who misrepresented her body might secure a longer stay in a lying-in hospital, the ramifications for misinterpreting vaccination symptoms could be much more severe. Vaccinators claimed that mothers cast vaccination into disrepute by mistakenly attributing their children's ailments to vaccination.[72] Vaccine charities instructed mothers to bring their children back to the charities several days after vaccination to allow vaccinators to check if patients' bodies had absorbed the vaccine. If vaccination had not taken hold, vaccinators recommended a second attempt. However, some mothers determined for themselves that vaccination had been succesful and so skipped the follow-up appointment. Vaccinators claimed that many of the so-called 'vaccine failures' were in fact patients who had never been successfully vaccinated, a situation that had not been rectified because mothers had not attended secondary appointments.[73] Vaccinators insisted that vaccination was effective, so long as all stages of the procedure were observed. Some medical men believed that deceit, as well as ignorance, led to maternal misdiagnoses. Dr Robert Thornon alleged that mothers blamed vaccination for their infants' skin complaints to conceal the shame of having caused the conditions through neglect or having themselves transmitted disease to their offspring.[74]

Mothers did not keep their medical opinions to themselves. As is clear from the above-quoted mother who informed medical men that smallpox was in the neighbourhood, plebeian women were aware of health concerns within their communities. Mothers who brought their infants to the Small Pox Hospital frequently updated the medical staff on the health of neighbours who had earlier been

[72] Plumbe, p. 60; *Report on the Cow-Pock*, p. 74.
[73] Thornton, p. 315.
[74] Ibid., pp. 363-64.

vaccinated at the institution.[75] Like the governors of lying-in charities, the managers of vaccine charities worried that plebeian parents circulated rumours. Misinformation about vaccination could not only jeopardise a charity's reputation, it could spark an epidemic of fear and cast the entire practice of vaccination into disrepute. There is evidence that neighbourhood talk turned some mothers against vaccination. Some mothers requested variolation at the Small Pox Hospital, claiming that they knew of infants who had contracted smallpox after vaccination.[76] Sarah Chandler had four of her children vaccinated but, after 'hear[ing] people speak against the Cow Pock […] she was afraid […] "it was not as safe as it had been"' and had a fifth child variolated.[77] Several medical men who responded to the Royal Colleges' 1807 questionnaire stated that mothers had stopped applying for vaccination because of local anti-vaccination rumours.[78]

Such was the power of rumour that the vaccine charities went to great lengths to control it. Vaccinators visited patients who developed post-vaccination symptoms, hoping to stifle gossip at its source. They instructed parents not to share their concerns with friends and reprimanded mothers who did so.[79] Pro-vaccination tracts instructed plebeian readers to seek medical guidance from doctors, rather than make their own judgements or consult ignorant neighbours.[80] The anti-vaccinist Benjamin Moseley claimed that vaccination advocates paid mothers to conceal the fact that their vaccinated children had contracted smallpox.[81] Moseley had an interest in portraying his opponents as underhanded, yet there may have been truth to his allegation. In 1803 Mr and Mrs Osborn complained to the Royal Jennerian Society that their child had contracted smallpox after vaccination. Although the society disagreed that the child had smallpox, it nevertheless gave Mrs Osborn seven shillings and

[75] LMA, Small Pox Hospital patient register, H/NW/1/SP/001.
[76] RCP, letter books on vaccination, RCP/OFFIP/2319-2321, no 127.
[77] *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor*, 6 vols (London: W. Bulmer, 1797-1814), V (1808), p. 194.
[78] RCS, letters from members on vaccination, RCS-MEM-10/1-4.
[79] Benjamin Moseley, *An Oliver for a Rowland; or, A Cow Pox Epistle to the Reverend Rowland Hill, 'under the Wing of Surrey Chapel*', 9th edn (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807), p. 88; John Coakley Lettsom, *Expositions on the Inoculation of the Small Pox and of the Cow Pock*, 2nd edn (London: H. Fry, 1806), p. 9; Thomson, p. 180.
[80] *Cottage Dialogue on Vaccination*, p. 13.
[81] *The Gentleman's Magazine,* October 1805, p. 897.

sixpence. The minute book does not record a reason for this payment, but the charity may have hoped the money would buy the Osborn family's silence along with medicines for the child.[82]

Anti-vaccination fears were strongest in the first decade of the nineteenth century; however, doubts about the safety of vaccination and the longevity of vaccination immunity persisted throughout the early nineteenth century (and beyond). Anxious mothers frequently demanded safeguards for their infants. Some mothers who were concerned that diseases other than cowpox could be transmitted through lymph insisted on inspecting the children from whom vaccine lymph was collected. Mothers who believed that vaccination introduced bovine humours into the body requested medicines to purge them. Parents were often unconvinced by vaccinators' assurances that vaccination had been successful and requested that their children be vaccinated again. It was not uncommon for mothers to go from vaccine charity to vaccine charity, seeking multiple vaccinations. The registers of the Small Pox Hospital record that mothers routinely applied for vaccination because they were 'not satisfied' with a vaccination that had been performed elsewhere.[83]

Vaccine charities were often willing to meet mothers' requests. Some institutions arranged their facilities so that mothers bringing their children to be vaccinated could view the children from whom lymph was taken.[84] Vaccinators were sceptical of Humouralism and believed that purging after vaccination was of no medical benefit. Yet, faced with the 'pressing solicitude' of mothers, some medical men humoured them by prescribing purgatives.[85] Some charity vaccinators revaccinated infants solely to satisfy anxious mothers. One woman had her child vaccinated three times at the Original Vaccine Pock Institution before bringing the infant to the National Vaccine Establishment. There, the child was vaccinated a further seven times 'at the earnest desire of the mother, who entertained a considerable degree of horror at her infant's taking the natural small-pox'.[86]

Medical reformers in the early nineteenth century encouraged medical practitioners to pay heed to emotions. In the 1790s Thomas Percival devised a set of professional standards for medical

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[82] WL, Royal Jennerian Society minute book, MS 4304, 12 May 1803.
[83] LMA, Small Pox Hospital patient register, H/NW/1/SP/001.
[84] Adams, *Popular View of Vaccine Inoculation*, pp. 58-59.
[85] Moore, p. 294; *The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, July 1808, p. 340.
[86] Marshall, p. 66.

men. Although originally intended for the Royal Manchester Infirmary, Percival's code was published in 1803 and became highly influential. In 1804 *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, a publication in which vaccinators regularly published, carried a favourable review of the book.[87] Percival wrote:

> The *feelings* and *emotions* of the patients […] require to be known and to be attended to, no less than the symptoms of their diseases. Thus, extreme *timidity* to venesection, contraindicates its use […] Even the *prejudices* of the sick are not to be contemned, or opposed with harshness. For though silenced by authority, they will operate secretly and forcibly on the mind, creating fear, anxiety, and watchfulness[88]

Percival argued that medical men merely increased suspicion by ignoring or suppressing prejudices. Rather than allow fears to fester unchecked, Percival recommended that medical practitioners acknowledge them and, in some cases, bow to them. Although purgatives and revaccination were effectively placebos, some vaccinators believed that they had a calming influence. They gave mothers palpable reassurance of their children's safety and combatted the dangerous imaginings of emotional minds. Nevertheless, not all vaccinators believed it wise to cater to mothers' emotional demands. Some medical men objected to the practice of revaccination. Henry Edmondston argued that, by even considering revaccination, medical men unwittingly convinced plebeian parents that vaccination was an uncertain procedure. Revaccination 'thoughtlessly and wantonly, nay, cruelly […] disturb[ed] the public mind'.[89] Yet, for all his disapproval of revaccination, Edmondston shared the concerns of medical men who embraced the practice. Like them, Edmondston recognised the agency of plebeian doubts and anxieties and the damage these could inflict on the reputation of vaccination.

Historians typically characterise agency in terms of rational thought and strategy, ignoring the role of emotions. However, emotions —regardless of whether truly experienced by plebeian women or merely ascribed to them by medical men— were a powerful force within the vaccine charities. Reason and emotion were not as diametrically opposed as many medical men (and historians of agency) suggested. Emotional responses to vaccination were not necessarily irrational impulses. They

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[87] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, February 1804, pp. 181-84.
[88] Thomas Percival, *Medical Ethics; or, A Code of Institutes and Precepts, Adapted to the Professional Conduct of Physicians and Surgeons* (Manchester: S. Russell, 1803), p. 10.
[89] Henry Edmondston, *Observations on Cowpox, and on the Necessity of Adopting Legislative Measures for Enforcing Vaccination, in a Letter to Mr Thomas Brown, Surgeon, Musselburgh* (London: Longman, 1828), p. 65.

were shaped by mothers' assessments of vaccination literature, their examination of their children's bodies, and their consultation with neighbours. Mothers were able to press their own demands on medical men who were eager to combat anti-vaccination anxieties. Although vaccinators largely dismissed maternal demands as irrational, to plebeian women, requesting accommodations was a perfectly rational means of safeguarding their children. Emotional agency could inform rational action.

The Agency of Infection

The chapter on lying-in charities illustrates how some birthing women were able to exercise their choice in London's vast medical marketplace. Plebeian mothers also faced a range of options when it came to immunising their infants. They could get their children vaccinated at the vaccine stations. Alternatively, they could obtain variolation from select charities or from private practitioners, druggists, or apothecaries. Mothers might also decide not to have their children immunised and take their chances with smallpox. The vaccine charities were well aware that parents had choice. The Royal Jennerian Society posted placards in public places that outlined the three options available to parents: the natural smallpox (the probable outcome of foregoing immunisation altogether), inoculated smallpox, and inoculated cowpox.[90] The placards presented the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. The governors of the Jennerian Society anticipated that, after having compared the three choices, viewers would conclude that vaccination was the best option.

Many mothers did not draw this conclusion. Between 1799 and 1802 the Small Pox Hospital allowed mothers to choose between variolation and vaccination. As the hospital's minute books do not survive, it is not clear why the institution did not discontinue variolation on introducing vaccination. The hospital governors may have felt obligated to satisfy patrons who had donated funds for variolation, they may have wished to keep variolation as an option for cases where vaccination failed, or they may have sought to maintain their footfall in a competitive medical marketplace by

[90] The text of the placard is reproduced in *The Medical Repository, and Review of American Publications on Medicine, Surgery, and the Auxiliary Branches of Science* (New York: [n. pub.], 1804), pp. 313-14.

offering their patients choices. In any case, in 1799 the governors anticipated that variolation would soon decline in importance as parents realised the advantages of vaccination. However, the governors' expectations were dashed; by 1802 demand for variolation showed little signs of diminishing. Frustrated by mothers' refusal to relinquish what they believed to be an outdated practice, the medical men of the Small Pox Hospital committed a 'pious fraud' in 1802, vaccinating almost all patients who were brought to the institution for variolation. Only eighty-eight (two percent) of the 4378 patients immunised at the hospital in 1802 were variolated.[91] Surviving sources do not reveal how many patients requested vaccination. However, William Wilberforce, a supporter of the hospital, stated that 'out of every 100 who had been vaccinated at the Small-pox Hospital, not five would have submitted [to vaccination], had they not supposed it to have been the old-fashioned mode of Inoculation'.[92]

It is difficult to determine how the hospital governors justified such a deception because there are no extant minute books from the institution. The hospital staff may have believed that avoiding the potentially fatal effects of variolation was more important that pandering to parents' wishes.[93] Convinced that plebeian parents were too misinformed or frightened to make rational decisions, the hospital governors may have felt justified acting in *loco parentis*. Regardless of the reasons behind it, the fraud deprived parents of the agency to exercise control over their children's bodies. By concealing the true nature of the immunisation from mothers, hospital staff denied them the opportunity to withhold their consent.

The Small Pox Hospital put an end to the pious fraud in 1803. Once again, surviving sources do not explain why this was so. It is possible that the hospital governors bowed to pressure from critics who disapproved of the deception. Many advocates of vaccination were uneasy with measures that compromised British liberty or challenged parents' right to raise their children as they saw fit. The anti-vaccinists were yet more scathing. Charles Maclean denounced the pious fraudsters for

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[91] *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, for the Year 1803* (London: W. Otridge, 1805), p. 360.
[92] Ibid.
[93] The medical staff at the Small Pox Hospital were not the sole practitioners to vaccinate patients against their wish. M. Dennett, a London practitioner who immunised private patients, admitted to vaccinating a child in spite of the parents' clear preference for variolation. Dennett argued that his deception was justified because previous attempts to variolate both the child and his siblings had failed and had caused undue suffering. *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, March 1803, p. 365. See also Rowley, p. 75.

imposing vaccination on the poor 'by force, intimidation, or deception'.[94] To Maclean, vaccinators were 'fanatical' tyrants who relentlessly persecuted those who dared to question their beliefs. Plebeian parents may have felt that the hospital had abused their trust, for they were evidently displeased with the pious fraud. Mothers reportedly avoided the hospital because they did not wish to be tricked into vaccination.[95] A father who brought his child to be variolated at the hospital allegedly threatened to shoot the physician if he substituted the vaccine.[96] The hospital governors may have realised that the distrust created by the pious fraud would hinder their efforts to promote vaccination among working-class people. Although they ceased tricking parents into vaccination, vaccinators at the hospital continued to exert pressure on mothers. Hospital staff refused variolation to most patients between 1803 and 1804. While some parents reluctantly submitted to vaccination when the hospital denied their request for variolation, many others left the hospital to seek variolation elsewhere.[97]

In 1805 William Woodville died and Joseph Adams replaced him as physician at the Small Pox Hospital. The change in directorship resulted in a softening of the hospital's stance towards variolation. From 1805 the hospital reintroduced variolation on a large scale. In 1804, with Woodville in charge, only 348 patients had been variolated at the hospital. The following year 2638 patients were variolated and 2096 vaccinated.[98] By 1807 the hospital was variolating nearly three times as many patients as it vaccinated.[99] Many medical men were horrified at the surge in the number of variolated patients and implored the Small Pox Hospital to stop variolating. Critics stated that the hospital's variolated outpatients were as dangerous as 'foxes with firebrands at their tail'.[100] They claimed that plebeian mothers were agents of infection who spread smallpox by carrying their infectious variolated infants through the public streets. The agency of infection was particularly problematic in London.

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[94] Charles Maclean, *On the State of Vaccination in 1810; in a Letter to the Right Hon. Richard Rider, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department* (London: W. Glendinning, 1810), p. 16.
[95] John Birch, *An Appeal to the Public, on the Hazard and Peril of Vaccination, Otherwise Cow Pox*, 3rd edn (London: J. Harris, 1817), pp. 84-85.
[96] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, November 1804, p. 442.
[97] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1806, p. 26.
[98] Blair, *Hints for the Consideration*, p. 222.
[99] The hospital vaccinated 1621 patients and inoculated 4595 patients in 1807. Blair, *Hints for the Consideration*, p. 216.
[100] The 'foxes with firebrands' is a Biblical allusion. In Judges 15:4, Samson gathers three hundred foxes, attaches torches to their tails, and sets them alight. He then releases the foxes into the fields of his enemy, where they cause widespread destruction. *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, August 1805, p. 144. See also Lettsom, *Expositions on the Inoculation*, pp. 14-16.

Urban crowding meant that a single variolated infant could infect countless others. Moreover, because the population of London was highly mobile, contagion radiated out from the metropolis. Medical men from as far afield as Norwich testified that variolated outpatients from the Small Pox Hospital carried smallpox into their midst.[101] The vaccinator John Ring argued that variolation was particularly hazardous in the capital because Londoners were 'less under the influence of their neighbours' than were the inhabitants of smaller communities.[102] Ring suggested that, whereas villagers and townspeople kept a close eye on their neighbours and encouraged parents to quarantine variolated infants, mothers could avoid such surveillance in populous and ever-shifting London.

According to critics of the hospital, plebeian mothers were at best unaware of the danger variolated children posed to the wider population and at worst were selfishly indifferent to the safety of others.[103] Critics acknowledged that parents were entitled to make medical decisions on behalf of their children. However, they maintained that there were limits to parental rights. Individual choice did not trump the collective good, as Ring claimed: 'If a father or mother of a family choose to murder their own family [through variolation], they have no right to murder their neighbours'.[104] Ring believed that medical men had a duty to protect the public from foolish mothers who consulted only their own narrow desires, without thought for the consequences of their choices.

Dr Adams rebutted the arguments of his critics. He argued that banning variolation would not result in increased uptake of vaccination. He insisted that, instead of accepting vaccination if variolation were refused, parents would choose not to immunise their children at all.[105] Adams believed that prohibiting variolation would increase the number of unimmunised children in the

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[101] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, October 1805, p. 359; John Cross, *A History of the Variolous Epidemic Which Occurred in Norwich in the Year 1819, and Destroyed 530 Individuals; with an Estimate of the Protection Afforded by Vaccination* (London: Burgess and Hill, 1820), p. 214; Blair, *Hints for the Consideration*, p. 218.

[102] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, October 1805, p. 359.

[103] Ring claimed that one mother carried her variolated infant under her apron when they were out in public, presumably to conceal the child's smallpox pustules from people who might take issue with the child's presence in public. *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, August 1805, p. 144.

[104] [John Ring], *A Letter to His Royal Highness the Duke of York, President; the Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, and Governors of the Small-Pox Hospital, on the Present State of That Charity* (London: John Murray, 1808), p. 14.

[105] Joseph Adams' attitude towards variolation was informed by his belief that smallpox and cowpox were the same disease. Adams claimed that inoculation with a mild strain of smallpox matter could be as safe as inoculation with cowpox matter. *The Gentleman's Magazine,* April 1810, p. 322.

population and, by extension, make the natural smallpox more prevalent. Adams believed that to deny parents variolation was to permit children to suffer and die from a preventable illness. Employing lesser-harm logic, Adams reasoned that it caused less harm to variolate than to allow the poor to contract smallpox naturally.[106] Adams' arguments ―like those of his opponents― recognised the agency that plebeian parents possessed as potential conduits of contagion.

The hospital medical staff labelled mothers who chose vaccination as 'wise women' and lectured the 'fools' who requested variolation on the benefits of cowpox.[107] The staff implied that, like the foolish virgins in the parable of the ten virgins, mothers who chose variolation were unprepared to accept a blessing and would regret their negligence. Hospital vaccinators may have hoped that mothers would opt for vaccination to avoid appearing foolish before other women. While Adams used moral and peer pressure to promote vaccination, he stopped short of coercion. He was of the opinion that parents would embrace vaccination only with 'time, and the seeing, and being convinced by ocular demonstration'.[108] Adams believed that medical men had a duty to educate the poor about vaccination. By bringing variolated and vaccinated patients together under one roof, the Small Pox Hospital allowed plebeian parents to compare the two procedures. Mothers who favoured variolation did not secure the procedure by winning a logical argument. Rather, mothers displayed agency by persistently expressing concern and exercising their choice. This agency operated on the sentiments of a physician who believed it was immoral to allow suffering and counterproductive to use compulsion.

Despite Adams' strident defence of variolation, the hospital governing committee eventually discontinued outpatient variolation in 1808. It is not possible to reconstruct the reasoning of the governors as the minutes of their meetings have been lost. However, it is probable that the governors grew tired of the criticism that was directed at the hospital. For three years critics attacked the hospital's variolation policy in print and the House of Commons had even discussed the issue.[109] Such

[106] For more information about lesser-harm logic and vaccination see Sydney A. Halpern, *Lesser Harms: The Morality of Risk in Medical Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[107] Moseley, pp. 80-81; Maclean, p. vii.
[108] *The Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1810, p. 322.
[109] Blair, *Hints for the Consideration*, pp. viii-ix.

sustained criticism may have compromised the hospital's ability to attract and hold the support of subscribers.

However, in a small concession to parental preferences, the hospital continued to variolate inpatients until 1822.[110] While few plebeian mothers chose inpatient admission because of its inconvenience, there were alternatives. The 1808 ban on outpatient variolation at the hospital did not significantly curtail mothers' options. Indeed, if the ban created a gap in the market, it was quickly filled by private inoculators. A flurry of advertisements for variolation appeared in the papers when the hospital discontinued outpatient variolation.[111] Apothecaries, barber surgeons, and chemists offered variolation for a small fee or for free.[112] Variolation was also available at the Finsbury Dispensary. In 1809 this general dispensary vaccinated only four people and variolated more than one thousand.[113] Concerned medical men and philanthropists attempted to suppress variolators. They subjected the Finsbury Dispensary to the same criticism they had earlier directed at the Small Pox Hospital.[114] As early as 1803, men associated with the vaccine charities called on the government to suppress variolation.[115] Between 1808 and 1814 Parliament considered several bills that proposed restricting variolation in populated areas and quaranting variolated patients. Many commentators viewed vaccination legislation as a threat to rights. William Cobbett hoped that legislators would not 'pass laws for taking out of a man's hands the management of his household, the choice of his physician, and the care of the health of his children'. He observed that, if they did do so, 'under this […] domiciliar thraldom, to talk of the liberty of the country would be the most cruel mockery'.[116] Some advocates of vaccination voiced similar objections. Dr Joseph Adams and Anthony Highmore, compiler of charity guides and Secretary to the Small Pox Hospital, opposed legal measures against

[110] Inpatient variolation also gave the medical staff recourse to an alternative if vaccination failed to take effect in a patient.
[111] *The Annual Medical Review and Register, for the Year 1808* (London: John Murray, 1809), p. 354.
[112] Medical practitioners could make money from gratuitous variolation by selling medicines to nurse patients through the symptoms of the inoculation.
[113] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, May 1811, p. 459; Maclean, p. 53.
[114] It is unclear whether this pressure forced the Finsbury Dispensary to abandon variolation. The charity practiced variolation until at least 1810. Its activities after this date are obscure.
[115] *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, January 29 1803, p. 1.
[116] Ibid., p. 2.

variolation.[117] In the end, all the bills presented to Parliament failed as many politicians were unwilling to support government intervention in parental decisions.

Undeterred by legislative setbacks, the National Vaccine Establishment attempted to bring existing laws to bear on variolation. In 1815 it employed old laws for preventing the spread of plague to prosecute Sophia Vantandillo for 'injuriously exposing' her variolated child to the public. The prosecution alleged that Vantandillo had carried her child through a crowd of people and past a school after her neighbours had warned that the child had virulent smallpox.[118] Eight people died from smallpox and one person lost an eye to the disease after reportedly coming into contact with the infectious patient. Mrs Vantandillo was imprisoned for three months. Gilbert Burnett, the apothecary who had variolated Vantandillo's child, was tried separately and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. These two cases were, however, exceptional. Few mothers or medical practitioners were punished for failing to quarantine variolated infants in early nineteenth-century London.

The fictional Spitalfields family in Reverend Stone's tale exercise their choice in an endless pursuit of goods. Only once, with vaccination, does Stone suggest that the family might choose *not* to take advantage of a form of charity. Stone indicates that, by neglecting vaccination, the family ensures that their son will be admitted onto the wards of the Smallpox Hospital with the natural smallpox. To the governors of vaccine charities, the most dangerous choices mothers could make were to forego vaccination or seek out variolation. These choices not only rendered the children concerned vulnerable to contracting smallpox or developing averse symptoms of variolation; they threatened the lives of others, for unimmunised or unvaccinated infants were agents of infection. The governors of vaccine charities attempted to restrict the choices of plebeian mothers and so control the agency of infection. However, these measures met with limited success. Plebeian women found alternative outlets for their choice when charity options were limited. Moreover, attempts to deny parents choice clashed with broader notions of the rights of free born Englishmen. In the early nineteenth century,

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[117] A. Highmore, *A Statement of Some Objections to the Bill as Amended by the Committee of the House of Commons, to Prevent the Spreading of the Infection of Small-Pox* (London: R. Wilks, 1808); *The Critical Review*, pp. 327-28.
[118] *The Times*, 28 April 1815.

the latter concerns were often triumphant, ensuring that plebeian women could continue to pursue their own interests.

The Agency of Consent

Medical charities were sites of clinical experimentation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Vaccine charities were no exception. Human experimentation in vaccine charities was vital to advancing the understanding and practice of vaccination during the early nineteenth century. Inspired by Jenner's cowpox trials, William Woodville experimented on the patients of the Small Pox Hospital in 1799. He vaccinated hundreds of patients, later subjecting many of them to variolation to test whether the vaccine protected against smallpox. Woodville also inoculated patients with smallpox and cowpox concurrently to ascertain which had the greatest effect.[119] Jenner had not reported any severe symptoms in his experimental subjects, so Woodville was surprised when several of his subjects developed outbreaks of pustules and one infant died.[120] Woodville's experiments were controversial. Jenner claimed that Woodville had accidentally confused smallpox and cowpox matter, thus producing the dangerous smallpox symptoms.[121] John Ring believed that Woodville had performed vaccination and the variolation in too quick succession; the smallpox matter thus displaced the cowpox matter before the vaccine had taken hold. Alluding to Woodville's experiments in *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, Ring cautioned medical men not to 'wantonly […] expose the lives of their fellow creatures to any unneccessary danger'.[122]

Woodville publicly refuted Jenner's claim that he had mistaken smallpox matter for cowpox lymph and, despite the unfavourable outcomes of his trials, the Small Pox Hospital began to offer vaccination to patients in 1800. Woodville also repeated his compound inoculation experiment for the benefit of Dr Antoine Aubert, a physician visiting from France. John Ring condemned this trial. He

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[119] William Woodville, *Reports of a Series of Inoculations for the Variolæ Vaccinæ, or Cow-Pox, with Remarks and Observations on This Disease, Considered as a Substitute for the Small-Pox* (London: James Phillips and Son, 1799), p. 140.
[120] Ibid., p. 151.
[121] Edward Jenner, *A Continuation of Facts and Observations Relative to the Variolæ Vaccinæ, or Cow-Pox* (London: Sampson Low, 1800).
[122] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, August 1799, p. 27.

was critical of the fact that the experiment did not advance medical knowledge as Woodville had already obtained results from his previous trial. In a play on words, Ring suggested that Woodville 'complaisance' to satisfy Aubert's 'idle curiosity' had made him complacent with the lives of his patients.[123] Woodville attracted similar criticism for injecting patients with grease from horses' hooves in 1799. The experiment was designed to test Jenner's theory that horses were the original source of cowpox and had passed the disease to cows.[124] In a letter to *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, Dr John Sims censured Woodville for not considering the risks the experiment posed to his subjects. Sims argued that the experiment was of no benefit to clinical practice; it merely sought to answer an academic question and so gratify the 'pathological curiosity' of medical men.[125]

Ring and Sims declared that experiments ought to have clear medical benefits and should not recklessly endanger human life. Pioneers in medical ethics advanced similar arguments in the early nineteenth century.[126] Thomas Percival acknowledged that charity patients played as essential role as test subjects for innovative medical procedures. However, he wrote that medical men should try new techniques on patients only if the proposed procedures:

> are conformable to reason and analogy; that no sacrifice be made to fanciful hypothesis, or experimental curiosity; that the infliction of pain and suffering be, as much as possible, avoided; and that the end in view fully warrant the means for its attainment[127]

Percival encouraged medical men to minimise the suffering of human subjects and he insisted that the lives of patients took precedence over academic curiosity. By training the attention of medical men on the interests of poor patients, Percival created discursive space for plebeian parents to defend the physical wellbeing of their children.

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[123] Ring, *Treatise on the Cow-Pox*, pp. 534-35, 586.
[124] Woodville, p. 7; James Bryce, *Practical Observations on the Inoculation of Cowpox. Pointing Out a Test of a Constitutional Affection in Those Cases in Which the Local Inflammation Is Slight, and in Which No Fever Is Perceptible* (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1802), p. 16.
[125] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, May 1799, p. 231.
[126] For more on medical ethics in the nineteenth century see Robert B. Baker, 'The Discourses of Practitioners in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain and the United States', in *The Cambridge World History of Medical Ethics*, ed. by Robert B. Baker and Laurence B. McCullough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 446-64; Ivan Waddington, 'The Development of Medical Ethics —A Sociological Analysis', *Medical History*, 19 (1975), 36-51; Michael Ryan, *Michael Ryan's Writings on Medical Ethics*, ed. by Howard Brody, Zahra Meghani, and Kimberley Greenwald (New York: Springer, 2009).
[127] Percival, p. 124.

Percival recommended that a committee of medical gentlemen review proposed new procedures to ensure that they met the above criteria.[128] The nature of the vaccine charities did not encourage such peer review. Each charity had a medical personality who, determined to establish his reputation on vaccination, kept a stranglehold on medical decision within the institution. As Walker's ejection from the Royal Jennerian Society demonstrated, these top men were intolerant of subordinates who questioned their methods. Yet, while vaccine charities were far from democratic, charity vaccinators were not entirely unregulated. Medical men associated with one charity frequently commented on the practices of other charities in treatises and medical journals. Criticism expressed in print exerted pressure on vaccinators to conform to emerging ethical standards.

In 1804 William Goldson, a doctor in Portsmouth, published *Cases of Small Pox, Subsequent to Vaccination.*[129] As its title suggests, the book detailed cases of patients who had contracted smallpox after vaccination. Goldson's book cast the prophylactic value of vaccination into doubt. Although the cases Goldson described had arisen in Devon, he implicated the London vaccine charities, for they had supplied lymph for some of the vaccinations. Goldson challenged the Original Vaccine Pock Institution or the Royal Jennerian Society (it was not clear which) to find patients who had previously been vaccinated and inoculate them with smallpox.[130] Goldson claimed that this experiment would prove the efficacy of vaccination. If vaccination granted long-term immunity against smallpox, the experimental subjects would not develop symptoms of the disease when variolated.

Goldson's challenge divided the opinion of medical men. Some argued that Goldson's experiment was unnecessary because the efficacy of vaccination was well established. The Royal Jennerian Society refused to perform the experiment, claiming that thousands of the charity's vaccinated patients had been exposed to smallpox and had not contracted the disease. John Ring argued that it was wrong to variolate when doing so served no medical purpose. He observed that

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[128] Ibid., p. 15.
[129] William Goldson, *Cases of Small Pox, Subsequent to Vaccination, with Facts and Observations, Read before the Medical Society, at Portsmouth, March 29th, 1804* (Portsea: William Woodward, 1804).
[130] Goldson addressed his pamphlet to the 'Directors of the Vaccine Institution, Salisbury Square'. Goldson may have meant the Original Vaccine Pock Institution at Golden Square or the Royal Jennerian Society at Salisbury Square.

although variolation would not kill a vaccinated child, it nevertheless caused pain and discomfort.[131] According to Ring, the experiment also posed psychological risks. Ring claimed that conducting the experiment would convince the uneducated that there was reason to doubt the security of vaccination, stoking anti-vaccination fears.[132]

Medical men who looked favourably on Goldson's challenge agreed with Ring and the Royal Jennerian Society that vaccination had already been proven to be effective. However, they argued that Goldson's experiment had merit even if it did not advance medical knowledge. A writer for the *Annual Review* declared that the experiment would reassure the public about the safety of vaccination.[133] The writer argued that increasing popular confidence in vaccination was worth the pain that experimental subjects might feel. Dr Pearson concurred. He claimed that Goldson's book caused parents to doubt the immunity of their vaccinated children. Pearson argued that the experiment would convince parents that their fears were unfounded, dispersing their 'uneasiness' and 'unhappiness'.[134] Much like the debate over revaccination, the debate over Goldson's experiment recognised the agency of plebeian doubt and fear. Indeed, the very justification for conducting (or not conducting) the experiment was the effect it would have on parental feelings.

Several medical men performed Goldson's experiments on charity patients. Surgeon John Creighton variolated hundreds of children at the Foundling Hospital and Dispensary for the Infant Poor in Dublin.[135] In London Dr Pearson conducted the experiment on patients of the Original Vaccine Pock Institution.[136] The physicians of the charity outlined the results of the experiment in a tract. The forward to the tract invites 'the Public [… to] duly appreciate the Trials', yet it is unlikely that many plebeian parents read the eighty-seven pages of detailed case notes and medical commentary.[137] The

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[131] John Ring, *An Answer to Mr Goldson; Proving that Vaccination Is a Permanent Security against the Small-Pox* (London: J. Murray, 1804), p. 14.
[132] Ibid.
[133] *The Annual Review, and History of Literature; for 1804* (London: Longman, 1805), p. 777.
[134] *A Statement of Evidence from Trials by Inoculation of Variolous and Vaccine Matter; to Judge the Question, Whether or Not a Person Can Undergo the Small Pox after Being Affected by the Cow Pock* (London: Cuthell and Martin, 1804), pp. 1, 6.
[135] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, September 1804, pp. 205-07.
[136] To leave no doubt that his experimental subjects were exposed to smallpox, Pearson variolated them at the bedsides of smallpox patients in the wards of the Small Pox Hospital. Pearson also encouraged the experimental subjects to shake hands with and kiss the smallpox patients. *Statement of Evidence*, p. 7.
[137] The study has not found evidence that Pearson devised other means of circulating the results of his trial among working-class people. Ibid., p. vii.

experiment certainly did not succeed in dispelling anti-vaccination fears, which remained strong after 1804.

Regardless of its aims, experimentation had the potential to cultivate suspicion. Reflecting in 1815 on Woodville and Pearson's experiments, John Ring alluded to James Gregory, a Scottish physician who wrote about medical ethics: 'it is a *disease*, which [Gregory] calls *craziness*, that occasions this rage for making idle, wanton, and useless experiments; and induces those who labour under it *corio humano ludere*, to play with human hide'.[138] Vaccinators seldom recorded the opinions of their patients in medical reports; however, there is evidence that plebeian parents suspected medical men of playing with human hide. As mentioned in the previous chapter, poor Londoners knew that many hospital procedures were experimental and that pauper bodies were routinely subjected to dissection.[139] Evidence of plebeian unease on this account was apparent within the lying-in charities. In some cases, the families of deceased patients refused to permit post-mortems and demanded lying-in hospitals surrender the bodies of their loved ones to them intact.[140] Anti-vaccinists capitalised on plebeian fears of experimentation. In a pamphlet 'Addressed to the Public in General', Robert Squirrell portrayed vaccination as a 'pernicious and baneful experiment' that was conducted with a callous disregard for the lives of the poor.[141]

Vaccinators noted that plebeian parents viewed them with distrust, a distrust perhaps founded in a fear of experimentation and fuelled by anti-vaccination propaganda. John Coakley Lettsom of the Royal Jennerian Society observed that that 'the professors of Medicine […] excite suspicion in many that there must exist with the Faculty some hidden sinister views'.[142] In its tract describing the Goldson experiments, the Vaccine Pock Institution attempted to dispel readers' suspicions by stating that the medical men who conducted the trials were not 'warped by private interest'.[143] The poor were

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[138] Ring, *Caution against Vaccine Swindlers*, p. 90.
[139] Richardson, p. 44, p. 164.
[140] John Ramsbotham, *Practical Observations in Midwifery, with a Selection of Cases* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1821), p. 393; Robert Lee, *Researches on the Pathology and Treatment of Some of the Most Important Diseases of Women* (London: S. Highley, 1833), p. 68; LMA, City of London Lying-in Hospital minute book, H10/CLM/A/01/007, 27 January 1830.
[141] Squirrell, p. 17.
[142] Lettsom, *Address to Parents*, p. 7.
[143] *Statement of Evidence*, p. vii.

reluctant to seek vaccination from 'respectable massive buildings', perhaps because they seemed too like the hospitals. Vaccine stations were often situated in settings which did not have close associations with medical interests and experimentation, such as church vestry rooms and Sunday schools.[144]

The relationships between plebeian parents and vaccinators were extremely fragile. Medical men had to be careful to conduct experiments in such a way that they did not aggravate the suspicions of plebeian parents and propel them into the hands of variolators. While there is little evidence to suggest that charity vaccinators proactively solicited the consent of experimental subjects before the 1830s, references to parents withholding consent indicates that there was discursive space for refusal. Dr Pearson applied to more than two hundred and fifty families for his Goldson experiment, yet secured only sixty subjects.[145] Pearson reported that most of the parents who refused their consent did so because they believed that vaccination had already secured their children from smallpox; however, fears about experimentation may also have informed their decisions. Parents expressed consent through their actions as well as their voices. As Michael Bennett explains, vaccinators required patients to bring their children to the charities for experimentation, a *de facto* form of consent.[146] Failing to attend was, in effect, to refuse consent. Joseph Adams was unable to gather complete results for one experiment because some of his subjects did not attend the hospital as directed.[147]

The early nineteenth century saw the first formulations of guidelines respecting patient consent. In 1831 the Scottish surgeon Michael Ryan stated in prominent medical journals 'that dangerous experiments should not be made on the sick without their consent'.[148] Ryan claimed that medical practitioners had observed this rule for more than two thousand years, yet he was among the first to explicitly call for patients' consent to experimentation. The medical profession did not universally adopt Ryan's principles.[149] However, the medical staff at some vaccine charities did display a heightened concern for consent. George Gregory, physician at the Small Pox Hospital in the

[144] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, p. 85.
[145] *Statement of Evidence*, p. 74.
[146] Bennett, 'Jenner's Ladies', p. 503.
[147] Blair, *Hints for the Consideration*, p. 238.
[148] *The London Medical and Surgical Journal*, November 1831, p. 435; *The Lancet*, 12 November 1831, p. 224.
[149] Baker, p. 450.

1830s, noted that he secured the ‘perfect approval' of both parents to experiment on a child named Mary Ann Ward.[150] In the early 1830s Gregory obtained permission from the hospital governors to admit patients for a variolation experiment, but he abandoned the experiment when plebeian families withheld their consent.[151]

Discussions of plebeian agency do not often consider consent, despite the fact that granting (or refusing) consent involves choice, voice, and the consultation of one’s own wishes —all of which are definitions of agency.[152] The giver of consent is not a passive tool in a project conceived by others, but an active participant. Plebeian parents did not create ethical standards, yet a medical discourse which recognised the opinions of parents strengthened their agency with respect to experimentation. When proposing experimentation, medical men recognised the agency of plebeian emotions and they adapted their methods to minimise fear and distrust.

The Agency of Sensation

Historian Logie Barrow dubs vaccine stations ‘miniature stockfarms, with babies as incubators for the production of vaccines’.[153] Barrow refers to Victorian vaccine stations, but his description is as fitting for the charities of the late Georgian period. Most vaccine stations aimed to vaccinate large numbers of patients and so maximise the amount of lymph they collected. The charities also took steps to encourage a steady supply of patients and lymph. They encouraged mothers to consider vaccination

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[150] *The London Medical Gazette*, 2 May 1835, p. 161.

[151] Adams reported that people refused their consent because of the health risks and inconvenience of the experiment. *The London Medical Gazette*, 2 May 1835, p. 159; George Gregory, *Elements of the Theory and Practice of Medicine; Designed for the Use of Students and Junior Practitioners*, 4th edn (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1835), p. 142.

[152] A small number of studies examine consent within the context of sexual abuse and parish apprenticeships. Sarah Toulalan, ‘Child Sexual Abuse in Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century London: Rape, Sexual Assault and the Denial of Agency’, in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914*, ed. by Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 23-44 (pp. 34-39); Katrina Honeyman, ‘Compulsion, Compassion and Consent: Parish Apprenticeship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England’, in *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914*, ed. by Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 71-96.

[153] Historians Logie Barrow and Nadja Durbach have both used the term ‘incubator’ to describe the infant patients of vaccine charities. Logie Barrow, ‘In the Beginning Was the Lymph: The Hollowing of Stational Vaccination in England and Wales, 1840-98’, in *Medicine, Health and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1600-2000*, ed. by Steve Sturdy (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 205-23 (p. 208); Nadja Durbach, ‘“They Might as Well Brand Us”: Working-Class Resistance to Compulsory Vaccination in Victorian England’, *Social History of Medicine*, 13 (2000), 45-63 (p. 47).

a routine procedure to be undertaken as soon as infants reached three or four months of age. Vaccinators worked methodically, extracting and inserting lymph alternately as they moved from patient to patient. Plebeian mothers were expected to observe a strict schedule and attend the charities on specially appointed days.

To the annoyance of charity staff, plebeian mothers were not concerned with factory-like efficiency. Rather than seeking vaccination as a matter of course, many mothers waited until there was a local outbreak of smallpox. Vaccine charities were swamped with patients when smallpox was rampant, but numbers decreased drastically when the disease was not prevalent.[154] Mothers' unpredictable behaviour was problematic for vaccine charities that relied on a constant flow of patients to maintain lymph stocks. Moreover, vaccinators claimed that mothers who waited until smallpox was in the neighbourhood before seeking vaccination contributed to anti-vaccination fears. They alleged that many so-called vaccine failures occurred in patients who had been infected with smallpox before vaccination; vaccination thus took the blame for symptoms and fatalities that smallpox had caused.

It was difficult enough for vaccinators to convince parents to attend the charities once, let alone secure their presence at secondary appointments in the days after vaccination. One physician estimated that not more than a fifth of vaccinated patients attended follow-up appointments.[155] Not all charities reported that their situation was so severe, yet they all had problems with attendance. Non-attendance was frustrating for the charities. Vaccine stations occasionally ran out of lymph when too few patients attended secondary appointments.[156] As noted above, charity staff could not ensure that vaccination had taken hold in patients who did not attend secondary appointments. If these patients subsequently contracted smallpox, it might be alleged that vaccination was an ineffective procedure.

Mothers failed to attend the vaccine charities for several reasons, besides concerns about the safety and efficacy of vaccination. Some women could not tolerate interruptions to their domestic

[154] Medical men observed that the poorest inhabitants of the metropolis were particularly impulsive when it came to vaccination: 'their improvidence renders them indifferent to advantages which are not of obvious and instant application; and terror alone, under circumstances of pressing and immediate danger, induces them to adopt th[e] safe and easy course' of vaccination. HCPP, National Vaccine Establishment. Copies of Reports from the National Vaccine Establishment to the Right Honourable Robert Peel, 1823 (194), VII.171, p. 1.
[155] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, p. 109.
[156] Ibid., pp. 103, 105.

routines or holidays.[157] Attendance was particularly poor during the wet and cold winter months. Mothers feared that exposing their infants to the elements while carrying them to and from the vaccine stations might harm their health.[158] Each vaccine charity had its own method of vaccinating that it claimed produced the best results. Mothers did not approve of some of these methods and avoided charities that practiced them. When it came to giving consent, plebeians envisioned the potential risks of vaccination. Sensation, on the other hand, was a response to physical realities. The emotional sensations in witnessing —or personally experiencing— vaccination were potent and informed expressions of agency.

The Royal Jennerian Society and the London Vaccine Institution inserted vaccine into one or two shallow incisions on each arm; however, the Small Pox Hospital made between eight and twelve deep punctures.[159] Hospital staff believed that bleeding during vaccination ensured the body absorbed lymph, but some parents were reportedly horrified at the sight of blood.[160] Most vaccine charities made small cuts into the first vesicles that formed after vaccination and extracted lymph from them. Not content to follow this technique, Walker cut up the first vesicles, wiped out the fluid, and collected lymph from the second vesicles to develop.[161] Ring claimed that mothers spoke Walker's name 'with horror' because of his unusual methods.[162] Ring noted that one mother informed him: 'my child's arm was *scraped* in such a manner, in order to take the matter from it, that I will never have any one inoculated [at the London Vaccine Institution] again'.[163] As one of Walker's fiercest critics, Ring was not an unbiased commentator. However, even Walker's sycophantic claimed that mothers were frightened of Walker and that few of them attended secondary appointments.[164]

Vaccinators observed that mothers frequently became 'alarmed' or 'excited' when children bled or displayed signs of pain. John Webster of the Original Vaccine Pock Institution claimed that mothers were often unwilling to allow vaccinators to cut their children, especially their girls. Webster

[157] Ibid., pp. 54, 105.
[158] Ibid., pp. x, 25, 50, 54.
[159] Ibid., p. 54.
[160] Ibid., pp. 49, 112, 122.
[161] Ibid., p. 114.
[162] Ring, *Caution against Vaccine Swindlers*, p. 110.
[163] 'Inoculated' in this context refers to vaccination. Ibid., pp. 114-15.
[164] Epps, p. 121.

did not state why this was so. Logie Barrow conjectures that 'feelings about female feebleness and inviolability' may have played a role.[165] It is also possible that mothers considered scars from cuts to be particularly unattractive in females. Dr Adams vaccinated girls high up on their arms so that scars would not be visible 'should the present fashion [for short sleeves] continue or be renewed when [the] patient arrives at age'.[166] Adams' allusion to marriageable age suggests that scarring could affect girls' matrimonial prospects. Although Adams did not specify whether he applied his rule to charity patients and affluent private patients alike, aesthetic appearances mattered to plebeian parents. Advocates of vaccination knew this, for their propaganda often emphasised the fact that vaccination did not disfigure children as the natural smallpox and variolation had the potential to do.[167]

Vaccine charities instituted a host of measures to encourage attendance. Most institutions extracted a verbal promise from parents that they would attend as directed. The London Vaccine Institution and Original Vaccine Pock Institution gave mothers certificates of their children's security if they attended all appointments.[168] Vaccine charities recorded the names and addresses of patients so that they could locate them if they neglected appointments. These measures were not entirely effective. Many mothers broke their pledges and were not tempted by the promise of certificates. A few mothers supplied false addresses so that the charities could not trace them.[169] Faced with widespread non-attendance, some vaccine charities outside of London collected monetary deposits from mothers, returning them only if patients kept all appointments.[170] Vaccine charities in the capital, however, did not introduce monetary pledges. John Vincent of the National Vaccine Establishment observed that 'the feelings of the public [were] too delicate' to tolerate pledges.[171] Vincent did not elaborate on the nature of these feelings. He may have feared that pledges would aggravate suspicion about medical men's motives, reversing the gains of the pro-vaccination campaign. The reluctance to

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[165] Barrow, p. 213.
[166] Adams, *Popular View of Vaccine Inoculation*, p. 60.
[167] *Cottage Dialogue on Vaccination*, p. 10. For more information on the role of the skin in pro- and anti-vaccination debates see Matthew L. Newsom Kerr, '"An Alteration in the Human Countenance": Inoculation, Vaccination and the Face of Smallpox in the Age of Jenner', in *A Medical History of Skin: Scratching the Surface*, ed. by Jonathan Reinarz and Kevin Siena (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), pp. 129-46.
[168] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. 82, 90.
[169] Marshall, p. 63; HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. 50, 105.
[170] *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor*, 6 vols (London: W. Bulmer, 1797-1814), VI (1814), p. 58.
[171] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. 40, 82.

introduce monetary pledges in London may also reflect the choices available to mothers in the metropolis. The medical marketplace of London gave mothers access to a range of immunisation choices that was unmatched elsewhere in Britain. Whereas mothers outside of London might submit to pledges because they had little alternative, London mothers might reject a charity that insisted on pledges in favour of a less demanding immuniser.

Some vaccine charities downplayed the distress and pain experienced by infants during vaccination. The medical staff at the Small Pox Hospital insisted that incisions produced only 'inconvenience' or 'slight' pain.[172] The hospital reassured parents that extracting lymph was 'neither painful nor at all injurious to the child'.[173] Somewhat unconvincingly, John Epps of the London Vaccine Institution claimed that children amassed in vaccine stations screamed in imitation of one another and not because they were in pain.[174] Some vaccinators suggested that mothers overreacted to the slightest indication of discomfort in their children. According to John Walker, maternal emotions resulted in irrational and selfish conduct. Walker suggested that by fixating solely on their child's temporary distress, mothers could not perceive the long-term advantages of vaccination or the public benefit in donating lymph. To Walker, mothers' irrationality was a product of their sex and class. He believed plebeian women did not have the education to accurately assess the value of vaccination, the masculine bravery to withstand discomfort, nor the gentleman's public spiritedness. Walker's biographer claimed that Walker possessed these attributes that mothers lacked. When a woman refused to allow Walker to take lymph from her child, he reportedly declared: 'Thou foolish woman, if thou wilt not do good to others, I will bless thy little one' and 'regard[ing] not tears, or cries, or screams, or threats', he forcibly performed the operation.[175] Walker evidently felt justified in acting in *loco parentis* as he believed emotion had compromised mothers' capacity for rational decision making.

As his speech to the mother demonstrates, Walker adopted the mannerisms of a religious man. He dressed and spoke like a Quaker, although the Society of Friends refused to admit him into its

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[172] Ibid., pp. 54, 75.
[173] *The Small-Pox and Vaccination Hospital, at Battle Bridge, St Pancras, Middlesex* (London: W. Guthrie, 1831), p. 10.
[174] Epps, p. 122.
[175] Ibid., p. 121.

ranks. Having determined that a child had been successfully vaccinated, Walker told the mother that 'Thy child is safe: fear not: fare thee well', echoing God's assurances to the people of Israel in the Book of Isaiah.[176] Walker's comportment may have been beneficial in his interactions with plebeian mothers. His biographer claimed that, although he scared off some mothers, others tolerated his methods because they found his parting blessing comforting. Walker was not the sole vaccinator to capitalise on a priestly air. James Moore of the National Vaccine Establishment once observed a Methodist preacher vaccinating the poor. In his account of his experience, Moore did not name the preacher, but he likely referred to pastor Rowland Hill who ran one of the busiest vaccine stations at Surrey Chapel. Moore recalled than an infant had shrieked when the preacher jabbed him with the lancet. To Moore's surprise, the mother, who 'would have been infuriate, had a surgeon extorted such screams', instead 'looked quite placidly at her revered pastor, being inwardly conceived, that all the pains taken and given by him, would in some mysterious way do good to her suckling'.[177]

Moore suggested that mothers had implicit faith in clergymen. Just as a Christian should unquestioningly accept the workings of God, so too should they trust the clergyman-vaccinator. When performed by a clergyman vaccinator, vaccination assumed the mysterious character of baptism, although the procedure protected the body rather than the soul. However, John Walker and Rowland Hill were anomalies. The vast majority of charity vaccinators were medical practitioners, a breed of men that was much more fallible and self-interested in plebeian eyes. Moore observed that mothers would not tolerate medical men who used the Methodist preacher's vaccination technique and he encouraged vaccinators to adopt a more 'merciful' approach.[178] Medical men who became known among plebeian women for treating infants cruelly might find that their patients dwindled in number, compromising the charity's lymph stocks and its reputation amongst subscribers and the medical community. Moore advised that lymph be inserted into two spots in each arm, but that fewer punctures should be made if there was 'apprehension' for a feeble child.[179] The medical staff at vaccine charities

[176] Ibid., p. 122.
[177] Moore, p. 292.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Moore did not make clear whether the 'apprehension' was that of the vaccinator or the patient's mother. Ibid., p. 291.

made similar accommodations. Dr Cullurne of the Royal Jennerian Society typically vaccinated in both arms; however, he adapted his method for timid children and vaccinated them only in a single limb.[180] If the infant patients of the vaccine charities exercised any agency, it was by fussing, squealing, or cringing before the vaccinator and so securing less painful treatment.

Vaccinators made concessions to patients and mothers because they operated in a highly competitive environment. Mothers who were unhappy with a charity's methods had the agency to patronise a different charity or a private inoculator. The field of medical ethics also encouraged medical men to heed patients' emotions. Thomas Percival and Michael Ryan counselled medical practitioners to minimise patients' anxiety. For example, they advised that bloodied clothing and instruments be kept out of sight so as not to 'excite terror' in patients.[181] Like most medical men of his day, Percival believed that emotions impacted on physical health. A fearful patient might not get the rest she needed to heal. A mother's emotional state could also affect her child. Anxiety, for instance, might cause a mother to cease producing breast milk for her child.[182] Soothing emotions had therapeutic benefits for both mother and babe. Medical men scrutinised how their colleagues dealt with emotions, just as they policed experiments. Walker's insistence on the 'cruel' practice of cutting up vaccine pustules contributed to his expulsion from the Royal Jennerian Society in 1806.[183] Several vaccinators condemned the 'barbarous' vaccination method employed at the Small Pox Hospital.[184] A correspondent to *The Lancet* recommended that Dr Gregory use a vaccinating tool which trapped blood rather than allow it to run down patients' arms.[185]

Smallpox aroused horror in those who witnessed its scarring and deadly effects. If smallpox was a frightening spectacle, so too was vaccination. Charity vaccinators reported that mothers were frequently alarmed by vaccination. Mothers' responses to vaccination were often unbidden reactions

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[180] *The London Medical and Physical Journal*, December 1804, p. 359.
[181] Michael Ryan, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence, Compiled from the Best Medical and Legal Works: Being an Analysis of a Course of Lectures on Forensic Medicine, Annually Delivered in London* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1832), pp. 57-58; Percival, p. 23.
[182] Adams, *Popular View of Vaccine Inoculation*, p. 56. See also Thomas Dixon, 'Patients and Passions: Languages of Medicine and Emotion, 1789-1850', in *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950*, ed. by Fay Bound Alberti (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 22-52 (p. 34).
[183] Ring, *Caution against Vaccine Swindlers*, p. 39.
[184] HCPP, Select Committee on Vaccine Board, pp. 50-51.
[185] *The Lancet*, 29 September 1832, p. 21.

to the sensational sight of blood and of physical blemishes or to the sight and sounds of pain. Although unintentional, mothers' reactions informed intentional expressions of agency. Mothers reportedly avoided charities whose practices they considered cruel and sought immunisation elsewhere. As was the case with respect to experimentation and anti-vaccination objections, many vaccinators adjusted their methods to reduce plebeian anxieties. By doing so, they not only sought to maintain a patient base that was large enough for lymph production but also to adhere to the latest developments in medical ethics.

Conclusions

Charity vaccinators characterised plebeian mothers as emotional creatures whose reason was overcome by panic, fear, and anxiety. They argued that plebeian women's emotional actions imperilled the health of their children and the general public. They insisted that women stoked fear by formulating and sharing misguided medical opinions. By choosing variolation or refusing all forms of immunisation, plebeian mothers risked their children becoming agents of smallpox infection. The governors of vaccine charities considered plebeian emotions so dangerous that they made concerted efforts to allay them. They devised an aggressive pro-vaccination publicity campaign, conducted experiments to reassure parents about vaccination safety, and endeavoured to limit parents' access to variolation. Attempts to promote vaccination through coercive measures were, however, of limited success. Plebeian mothers continued to seek out alternatives to vaccination, assisted by a medical marketplace that catered to their desires. The issue of vaccination intersected with a broader discourse on the rights of parents to make decisions on behalf of their children. There was widespread unease about private organisations interfering in family matters, despite vaccinators' insistence that plebeian parents' private decisions about vaccination had very public ramifications. Many medical men believed it was more productive to accommodate, rather than oppose plebeian emotions. Mothers frequently obtained concessions from charity vaccinators who were anxious to secure patients for their lymph and to prevent plebeian women from making dangerous immunisation choices. Historians typically speak of agency solely in terms of rational action, yet power could also be expressed through

emotions. As Claire Langhamer argues, 'emotion […] could drive social and political change, acting as a vehicle for the operation of agency within everyday life'.[186]

Ethical considerations impacted on the agency of plebeian mothers and their infants. The nascent field of medical ethics encouraged medical men to respect the feelings of patients. The ethicist Thomas Percival warned medical men that attempts to suppress plebeian prejudices were often counter-productive, only heightening alarm and mistrust.[187] In terms of both sense of sensibility, Percival and his adherents suggested it was far better for medical men to openly acknowledge and attend to the emotions of the poor. Medical consent is relevant to a discussion of agency for it concerns individuals' ability to exert control over their own bodies (and that of their dependents). The Small Pox Hospital's 'pious fraud' raised concerns about plebeian consent; these concerns may have contributed to the abandonment of a scheme that severely compromised the agency of the poor. However, the issue of consent was most prominent in debates over clinical experimentation. Ethicists condemned trials that unjustifiably risked patients' lives. Increasingly, too, ethicists emphasised the importance of securing the consent of experimental subjects. Ethical discussions created rhetorical space for plebeian women to express their own opinions and pursue their own interests.

The founders of the vaccine charities anticipated that they would eradicate smallpox. By the late 1830s, however, it was obvious to medical men and philanthropists that their efforts to promote vaccination had not been entirely effective. Smallpox remained a threat. Between 1837 and 1839, a smallpox epidemic killed 30,819 people in England, 5186 of whom were in London.[188] Discussing proposed vaccination legislation, an unnamed writer in *The Lancet* estimated in 1840 that one fifth of the population of the United Kingdom was unvaccinated and 20,000 died from smallpox each year as a result.[189] He claimed that the poor kept smallpox alive, for the great majority of unvaccinated children were working class. He detailed how a typical plebeian mother justified her decision to reject vaccination:

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[186] Claire Langhamer, 'Everyday Love and Emotions in the Twentieth Century', in *The Voices of the People: An Online Symposium*, *The Many-Headed Monster* <https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2013/08/28/claire-langhamer-everyday-love-and-emotions-in-the-20th-century/>.
[187] Percival, p. 10.
[188] *The London Medical Gazette*, 8 January 1841,
[189] *The Lancet*, 30 May 1840, p. 338.

> She believes that cutting for the cow-pox is a bad thing altogether; that it introduces 'humours' into the child's blood; that it imparts a 'beast's' disease, and that it is much better to let things take their natural course […] the place where they inoculated [vaccinated] children gratis was at a great distance, and they took the matter from all sorts of scabby little things; besides, she did not like the doctor there, who was a great fool, or very rough, and unfeeling.[190]

The parental objections described in *The Lancet* differed little from those attributed to mothers in earlier decades. Working-class parents in 1840 reportedly feared and distrusted vaccination and balked at the 'unfeeling' manner in which some vaccinators handled their infants' bodies. However, the writer counselled against compelling parents to have their children vaccinated. He argued that forcing vaccination on a mother would 'neither enlighten her mind; nor dissipate her prejudices; but make her cling to error with a morbid tenacity'.[191] Echoing the arguments Dr Adams had made in the early years of the nineteenth century, the writer argued that plebeian anti-vaccination feelings could only be overcome if working-class people were educated and exposed to the good example of middle and upper-class citizens who embraced vaccination for their own children.

In 1840 the Vaccination Act was made law. Although it did not coerce parents to vaccinate with threats of fines or imprisonment, it did outlaw variolation. The act instructed parish authorities to provide free vaccination to all who applied for it, a measure that only aggravated working-class people's anti-vaccination feelings as they came to associate vaccination with the hated New Poor Law.[192] Although the act restricted plebeian parents' immunisation options, they nevertheless retained the ability to refuse vaccination until 1853, when the government made the vaccination of infants compulsory. However, the fears associated with parents in the early nineteenth century did not disappear in the face of legislation. They remained strong throughout the Victorian era.[193] Indeed, parents' anxieties about the safety of vaccination and their distrust of medical motives continue to fuel the anti-vaccination movement in the twenty-first century. The agency of emotions, infection, and choice retain their influence today.

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[190] Ibid., p. 339.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Durbach, 'They Might as Well Brand Us', p. 51.
[193] F.B. Smith, *The People's Health 1830-1910* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 161-62; Stanley Williamson, *The Vaccination Controversy: The Rise, Reign and Fall of Compulsory Vaccination for Smallpox* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).

4. Infant Schools

> By the time the child is eighteen months to two years old, it becomes convenient to his mother to *'get him out of the way*': for this purpose he is sent to the *'Infant School*', and, in this seminary, enters upon another wide field of eleemosynary immunities. By the age of six he quits the *'Infant School*', and has before him an ample choice of schools of higher class. He may attend the *'Lancasterian School*[']for 2*d.* a week, and the *National* for 1*d.*, or *for nothing*. His parents naturally enough prefer the latter school, ―it may be less liberal in principle, but it is lower in price. In some instances, too, it is connected with a *cheap clothing society*; in others *it provides clothing* itself […] To be sure, these are only *collateral* advantages. But it is perhaps excusable in a parent delivered by the *'Royal Maternity Society'*, to value these above any of the more obvious and legitimate benefits to be derived from a system of education[1]

Her child having survived his first year, the Spitalfields mother shows more concern for obtaining the 'eleemosynary immunit[y]' of charity schooling than she ever did for securing his immunity to smallpox. She has a range of choices: infant schools, charity schools, National schools, Lancasterian schools, and Sunday schools. She has clear criteria for her selection. The school must cost her very little and it must offer material goods, such as clothes. While her respectable neighbours are ashamed to see their children in charity uniforms, the Spitalfields mother considers it a '*badge of distinction*' to have her son so attired.[2] Reverend Stone portrays her as foolish. Not only does she fail to see the importance of getting her child vaccinated, she is blind to the 'obvious and legitimate' benefits of education: the attainment of knowledge, the formation of character, and the development of practical skills. To her, schooling is merely a means to accumulate goods and to pawn off her maternal responsibilities. She constantly transfers her son from school to school in pursuit of the best resources, withdrawing him from school altogether when she feels that he is not getting enough. A victim of his mother's skewed priorities, the boy receives a poor education and is condemned to perpetuate the mistaken logic of his parent.

All of the charitable schools in Reverend Stone's tale shared the same basic mission —to civilise poor children and mould them into productive and law-abiding citizens. Infant schools were the most ground-breaking charitable schools to emerge in early nineteenth-century London. They

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[1] William Stone, *Evidence of the Rev. William Stone, Rector of Spitalfields, and Other Witnesses, as to the Operation of Voluntary Charities* ([London?]: [n. pub.], 1833; repr. 1837), p. 16.
[2] Ibid., p. 17.

specialised in 'infants' between the ages of eighteenth months and seven years, a younger age group than was admitted into other schools. Drawing on the ideas of European educational reformers, infant school educationalists (men who professed to be experts in education) proposed an innovative learning programme that emphasised play and sensory stimulation, rather than instruction in literacy or the rote memorisation of facts. Unlike many charitable schools, infant schools did not rely on corporal punishment, but favoured gentler disciplinary techniques that taught children to distinguish right from wrong. Infant schools were the first charitable schools to cater solely to infants, yet for centuries —as far back as the sixteenth century— poor women had been operating small 'dame' schools from their own homes to teach young children basic literacy and (for girls) needlework skills. Educationalists claimed that dame schools were unhealthy, brutal, and of little scholastic merit and only deepened the demoralisation and ignorance of the poor. The founders of infant schools optimistically projected that their modern institutions would force the backward dame schools into extinction much 'as the steam engine and power-loom have taken the place of the spinning wheel and hand-loom'.[3] The first section of this chapter introduces how infant schools emerged and how they attempted to cultivate morality and economic self-sufficiency in poor families.

Many plebeian parents did not show the eagerness of the Spitalfields mother for charity schooling, but proved unwilling to embrace the Infant System of education.[4] Whereas 'prejudice' against vaccination was founded in concern for children's health, economic considerations informed parents' opposition to infant education. The second section of the chapter reveals how the economy of makeshifts informed expressions of agency. Unlike the fictional Spitalfields mother, many plebeian parents were not obsessed with extracting goods from schools, but were eager to secure a quality education for their children that would serve them well as adults in the workforce. Parents exerted pressure on schools to provide a flexible, economical, and efficient schooling that met their financial priorities. Teachers' attempts to impose regulations on parents frequently failed as many parents chose to use the schools according to their own rules. Choice plays a prominent role in this section as it does

[3] *The Visitor; or, Monthly Instructor, for 1838* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1838), p. 368.
[4] The educationalist Samuel Wilderspin coined the term 'Infant System' to describe his vision of infant education. Samuel Wilderspin, *Early Discipline Illustrated; or, The Infant System Progressing and Successful* (London: Westley and Davis, 1832).

in the previous chapter. Just as many mothers chose not to patronise the vaccine charities, so did many parents refuse to send their children to infant schools, opting for the dame schools instead. The previous chapter demonstrates how vaccine charities altered their practices in response to what they perceived as plebeian women's emotional attitudes. The agency of plebeian parents also shaped the nature of infant schools. Philanthropists founded the schools to provide moral education to the poorest infants in London. By the 1830s, however, many schools primarily taught literacy to the children from the artisanal class. The demands and choices of plebeian parents contributed to this transformation.

If plebeian parents had their own priorities, so too did their infants. The lying-in charities and vaccine charities were both concerned with young children: the lying-in charities with newborn babies and the vaccine charities with children who were under one year of age. Such young children did not exert significant agency, although their parents might represent their interests. The rudiments of agency can, however, be found in the slightly older children who attended the infant schools. The third section of the chapter does not focus on a single conception of agency, but on a category of person that exercised agency —infants. Educationalists encouraged infants to employ their physical and intellectual powers, but only within clearly delineated boundaries. Not only did many parents disapprove of educationalists' methods of stimulating infants' agency, but many infant scholars attempted to express their agency beyond the bounds of the Infant System. Rather than submit to the structured environment of the infant school, they played the truant and pursued childhood amusements that educationalists condemned. This agency did not take the form of organised resistance, yet it nevertheless challenged the operation of the infant schools, forcing teachers to adapt their methods.

The agency of infants did not necessarily involve disobedience, however. It has already been shown how some lying-in patients exercised agency in promoting the values of hospital governors. This chapter builds on the notion of agency of compliance, suggesting that there might be agency in the instrumental sense of acting as an agent of another's plans. Educationalists trained infant scholars to be agents of change in their own homes. Infant school teachers reported that infants carried their infant school lessons home and reformed the conduct of their parents. In the case of many 'infant missionaries', the agency of children was pitted against that of their parents. It is possible that such stories of infant evangelising were wishful thinking on educationalists' part. However, even if infant

missionaries are a representation of agency rather than a reality, they nonetheless suggest new ways of characterising agency. While historians equate agency with voice and strategy, the example of infant missionaries reveal that agency is not solely the preserve of the articulate. The guileless and prattling infant might exercise a greater degree of agency than a streetwise adult.

Historical Context

The industrialist and social reformer Robert Owen opened the first infant school at New Lanark, Scotland, in 1816. Owen believed that education was key to improving the moral and economic condition of the poor and to securing a contented workforce for his cotton mills. Owen claimed that 'temper or disposition' was largely decided within the first two years of life and that habits acquired in infancy lasted a lifetime.[5] He believed it was too late to begin education at six or seven years of age (as was the common practice in charitable schools) for children's moral character had solidified by then. Influenced by the educational theories of Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi, Owen instructed that infants in his school 'were not to be annoyed with books'.[6] Instead, teachers conversed with the scholars, employing everyday objects, pictures, and maps to capture their interest. Owen publicised his venture widely, corresponding with philanthropists, leading tours of the school, and giving public lectures.

The philanthropist and MP Henry Brougham took an interest in Owen's establishment and founded the first English infant school at Brewer's Green, Westminster, in 1819.[7] The Westminster Free Day Infant Asylum was modelled on the New Lanark school and its master, James Buchanan, had previously taught at Owen's establishment. In 1820 Brougham's friend Joseph Wilson set up the Spitalfields Infant School on Quaker Street. Samuel Wilderspin, a former clerk and a Swedenborgian, was appointed as teacher. Thereafter, established educationalists trained teachers who went on to

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[5] Robert Owen, *A New View of Society; or, Essays on the Formation of Character Preparatory to the Development of a Plan for Gradually Ameliorating the Condition of Mankind*, 3rd edn (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), p. 81.
[6] Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen. Written by Himself. With Selections from His Writings and Correspondence*, 2 vols (London: Effingham Wilson, 1857-57), I (1857) p. 140.
[7] G. Jeffrey Machin, 'The Westminster Free Day Infant Asylum: The Origins of the First English Infant School', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 20 (1988), 43-56.

found their own schools. The founders of the first schools were connected by ties of friendship and religion. Reverend William Wilson, brother to Joseph Wilson who had established the Spitalfields Infant School, received instruction from Wilderspin before launching St Mary's Infant School in his parish of Walthamstow in 1824.[8] Swedenborgians, Quakers, Unitarians, and Evangelical Anglicans were prominent actors in the early infant schools. Nonconformist educationalists were enthusiastic about non-traditional educational approaches.[9]

While he was a teacher at Spitalfields Infant School in the 1820s, Wilderspin developed a theory of early education and began to promote it in print as the 'Infant System'. He established himself as an authority on infant schools and left London in 1825 to tour the United Kingdom, lecturing and establishing new schools. Although Wilderspin had been trained by Buchanan and initially acknowledged Owen as his inspiration, he later distanced himself from both men, arguing that their attempts at infant education were slapdash compared to the systematic programme he had 'originated'. There were additional divisions within the infant school movement. Educationalists of different religious persuasions disagreed on the role of religion in infant schools. While some insisted that the infant school curriculum should be nondenominational, concentrating only on the central tenets of Christianity, evangelical educationalists placed greater emphasis on doctrine.[10] There were also disagreements about whether hymn-singing and praying ought to be allowed and about the appropriateness of some forms of correction.[11]

Despite their differences, most infant school pioneers subscribed to three key principles. Firstly, they believed that infants learned best by playing and using their senses and that education should be amusing, capitalising on children's natural curiosity. Secondly, they argued that controlling

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[8] Mary Clare Martin, 'Children and Religion in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2000).

[9] Historians have written much about how religious beliefs shaped the nature of early education. See in particular Phillip McCann and Francis A. Young, *Samuel Wilderspin and the Infant School Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

[10] Ibid., pp. 188-89.

[11] The Quaker educationalist Thomas Pole opposed singing and praying because 'it is possible the gratification of the creature may be more consulted than the will of the Creator'. Pole feared that children worshiped with unsuitable levity in the infant schools. He also disapproved of the light physical and shaming punishments that Wilderspin employed. Thomas Pole, *Observations Relative to Infant Schools, Designed to Point Out Their Usefulness to the Children of the Poor, to Their Parents, and to Society at Large* (Bristol: G. Goyder, 1823), pp. 50-55.

behaviour extrinsically (as with corporal punishment) was inferior to encouraging children to regulate their own conduct. And, lastly, they insisted that the cultivation of moral character was a more pressing priority than instruction in literacy and numeracy.

While the first school for infants in Britain was in the semi-rural setting of New Lanark, the first infant schools in England were for city-dwelling children. The promoters of infant schools argued that urban parents were often too busy earning a living to properly supervise or instruct their children. They criticised the childcare options available to working parents. In their opinion, the dame schools damaged infantile bodies and minds with their unhealthy premises, brutal discipline, and poor scholastic standards.[12] They claimed the practice of entrusting infants to the care of an older sibling or neighbouring child was also harmful, for these nurses did not have the maturity to safeguard their charges. It was also common for parents to leave their infants home alone or to set them loose on the streets while they saw to their work. Educationalists condemned these strategies, arguing that they exposed infants to physical harm. Wilderspin told tales of untended infants who tumbled out of the windows of multi-storey buildings and who fell under the wheels of carts.[13]

In the eyes of educationalists, the city streets posed a moral, as well as a physical, threat to small children.[14] They believed that children were initiated into crime and beggary on the streets. They claimed that, left to their own devices, children ganged together and pilfered from market stalls, before graduating to more daring offences. They believed that popular street-based entertainments threatened public morality. Wilderspin argued that fairs, Guy Fawkes bonfires, and traditional begging customs encouraged children to thieve, destroy private property, and hassle members of the public.[15] By removing children from the streets, infant schools hoped to promote public order. It was a

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[12] McCann and Young, pp. 103-04; D.G. Goyder, *A Treatise on the Management of Infant Schools* (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1823), p. 38; *The Edinburgh Review*, May 1823, p. 445; Pole, p. 23, pp. 29-30.
[13] S. Wilderspin, *On the Importance of Educating the Infant Poor, from the Age of Eighteen Months, to Seven Years. Containing an Account of the Spitalfields Infant School, and the New System of Instruction There Adopted*, 2nd edn (London: Simpkin & R. Marshall, 1824), p. 15; S. Wilderspin, *Infant Education; or, Practical Remarks on the Importance of Educating the Infant Poor, from the Age of Eighteen Months to Seven Years; Containing Hints for Developing the Moral and Intellectual Powers of Children of All Classes*, 4th edn (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1829), p. 50. See also *The Saturday Magazine*, 18 August 1832, p. 63.
[14] Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), p. 24.
[15] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 190-95. For more on traditional begging practices see Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 181-88.

goal shared by the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, a charity established in 1818 (a year before the first London infant school) to rid the city of beggars. It is no coincidence that both infant schools and the Mendicity Society emerged in the 1810s. Reports suggested that both begging and crime were on the rise in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, as discharged servicemen flooded the labour markets and England faced economic depression. Criminal behaviour in youth had long concerned philanthropists. However, as Peter King argues, the issue of juvenile delinquency became particularly pressing in the 1810s, as philanthropists associated children with rising crime rates.[16] Children were becoming a more visible problem, for their numbers were increasing rapidly with the growth in population.[17] One educationalist noted that in the winter of 1819, the capital was 'alarmingly infested' with between eleven- and fifteen-hundred boy thieves.[18] Philanthropic groups and a parliamentary committee investigated the problem of juvenile delinquency, concluding that lack of education contributed to crime.

Of course, infant schools were hardly the first charities to address crime. Charity schools, Sunday schools, schools of industry, National, and Lancasterian schools all hoped to instil virtuous principles in children and discourage antisocial behaviour. Such charitable reformatories as the Marine Society (est. 1756), the Philanthropic Society (1788), and the Refuge for the Destitute (1804) dealt with juvenile criminals or youths who were thought to be at risk of falling into crime. However, infant school educationalists claimed that these institutions were not sufficient to address juvenile crime. Samuel Wilderspin wrote about a boy named Richard Leworthy who stole five sovereigns from his master shortly after the Refuge for the Destitute discharged him as a reformed character.[19] To Wilderspin, this case proved that bad habits formed in infancy were difficult to dislodge in adolescence. At the founding meeting of the Infant School Society in 1824, a governor of the Refuge observed that two-thirds of the youths whom the police courts sent to the institution had not been

[16] Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 104.
[17] McCann and Young, pp. 37-28.
[18] Pole, p. 17.
[19] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 16-17.

educated.[20] The implication was that, had these juveniles received moral and religious instruction early in life, they might not have embarked on criminal behaviour.

Infant school educationalists argued that charity was better directed at preventing immorality from taking hold in children than attempting to reform confirmed criminals. They insisted that education should begin as soon as children could walk, before they had had the chance to develop immoral habits. Educationalists conceived of infants in Lockean terms, as blank slates. Early instruction ensured that moral principles made the first impression on infants' minds, preventing dangerous influences from gaining a foothold. Unlike the streets, the infant schools were regulated spaces, free from immoral temptations, in which children's moral development could be carefully managed.

Infant schools capitalised not only on the pliability of young children's characters, but also on infants' natural curiosity and eagerness to learn.[21] In practical terms, too, educationalists believed that infants were ideal candidates for education. They claimed that children who were younger than seven years of age could not contribute to the family income. Indeed, they argued that infants compromised parents' earning ability by constantly distracting them from their work.[22] While older children were frequently kept from school so that they could help their parents, infants could better be spared for education. Educationalists argued that infant schools could have far-reaching benefits for entire families. With infants occupied at school, older siblings were relieved of their childminding duties and might attend school themselves. Mothers, meanwhile, could get more accomplished with their toddlers removed from underfoot. Educationalists noted that mothers often became annoyed with their children when they were constantly in each others' company and frequently lashed out at their infants. By relieving mothers of their infants for several hours each day, infant schools would reduce maternal stress and foster love and harmony in plebeian households.[23]

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[20] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, pp. 83-84.
[21] Henry Brougham, *The Speech of Henry Lord Brougham, in the House of Lords, on Thursday, May 21, 1835, on the Education of the People* (London: [n. pub.], 1835), pp. 12-13.
[22] Pole, p. 10; Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 90.
[23] P.L.H. Higgins, *An Exposition of the Principles on Which the Infant System of Education Is Conducted; in a Series of Answers to Questions Respecting It* (London: Thomas Goyder, 1826), pp. 17-18; *Central Society of Education. Second Publication* (London: Taylor and Walton, 1838), p. 232; Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 65.

The previous chapters have shown that plebeian parents were well aware of their options when it came to lying-in and immunisation. Parents were similarly knowledgeable with respect to schooling. Information was available from multiple sources. Teachers and district visitors spoke to parents about infant education.[24] Many teachers encouraged parents to ask them questions about infant education and to visit the schools. Information about infant schools also circulated through unofficial channels. Parents took note of how their neighbours educated their children, for schooling was a point of competition among plebeian parents. Wilderspin claimed that Spitalfields parents were so impressed with scholars' singing at a funeral that they enquired how they could get their children into the Quaker Street school.[25] Working-class adults discussed the schools amongst themselves. Like the pro-vaccinists in the previous chapter, educationalists were suspicious of neighbourhood talk, for they worried that ill-informed parents and self-interested dames would spread misinformation about the schools.[26]

Conversation could propagate rumours. And yet, infant school educationalists believed that conversation could also be a powerful tool for correcting misguided opinions. By speaking with a wise friend, a misinformed person might recognise the error in his or her logic. Infant school teachers used conversation to reason with their pupils. Parents were also exposed to reasoned conversation in 'dialogue' texts which, as their name suggests, feature a dialogue between two characters. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, philanthropists adopted the dialogue, a literary form that had its origins in the Socratic dialogues, to promote moral and religious conduct among the poor.[27] Dialogues were also designed to reduce popular 'prejudice' towards new types of charities and

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[24] *The Educational Magazine*, May 1835, p. 296; HCPP, Select Committee on Education of People of England and Wales, 1835 (465), VII.763, pp. 51-53; *The Useful Christian: A Memoir of Thomas Cranfield, for About Fifty Years a Devoted Sunday School Teacher* (London: Religious Tract Society, [1844]), p. 147.
[25] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 132.
[26] *The Edinburgh Review*, May 1823, p. 444; *Friendly Advice to My Poor Neighbours: In a Series of Cottage Tales and Dialogues* (London: C., J., G., & F. Rivington, 1829), pp. 139, 140; Pole, p. 73.
[27] Hannah More used the dialogue to promote religiosity and morality among the poor in the late eighteenth century. Among her Cheap Repository tracts are *Turn the Carpet; or, The Two Weavers, in a Dialogue between Dick and John* and *The Riot; or Half a Loaf is Better than No Bread. In a Dialogue between Jack Anvil and Tom Hod*. In the early nineteenth century the Religious Tract Society produced titles such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning: A Dialogue between William Ready and Robert Wise at the Pay Table* and *A Dialogue between Jon Smith and Thomas Brown, Two Fellow-Apprentices*. For more information on evangelical dialogues, see Adrian J. Wallbank, *Dialogue, Didacticism, and the Genres of Dispute: Literary Dialogues in an Age of Revolution* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 15-52.

medical procedures. *A Cottage Dialogue on Vaccination*, for example, encouraged parents to vaccinate their children. Dialogues on infant schools feature a working-class parent (or grandparent) who shares all her objections to the Infant System with another character ―either a second parent, a philanthropist, or a teacher. Invariably, the latter character convinces the former that her antipathy towards infant schools is unreasonable. The authors of dialogues hoped that the reader would identify with working-class characters in the dialogues:

> The conversation draws the reader insensibly along. He is generally one of the speakers introduced: he finds his own sentiments and reasonings attacked and defended: he feels every argument that is adduced, and the subject fixes itself strongly and deeply in his mind.[28]

In theory, the reader's own opinions would change along with those of the characters in the tract. Although the statements of fictional characters are not exact replications of the views of real parents, the dialogues had to reflect parents' true concerns if they were to be persuasive.[29] Many of the infant school dialogues were published anonymously, but their detailed descriptions of the aims and methods of the Infant System suggest that the authors were familiar with the institutions and likely had first-hand experience of parental 'prejudice'.[30]

Infant school dialogues feature both working-class mothers and fathers as characters.[31] This suggests that plebeian parents were alike involved in determining where their children would be educated. However, mothers saw to the practical side of schooling, because it was they who were typically responsible for the daily care of infants.[32] While working-class fathers frequently spent long stretches of time away from home, sometimes setting off for work before their children had risen in

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[28] *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years of the Religious Tract Society: Being a Compendium of Its Reports, and Extracts from the Appendices* (London: Benjamin Bensley, 1820), p. 16.
[29] McCann and Young, p. 102.
[30] At least one tract was written by a teacher. David Stow, schoolmaster at the Glasgow Model Infant School created a dialogue to counter the objections of working-class parents. Stow's biographer wrote that the dialogue 'represents, in admirable Scotch […] the habitudes of thought and expression which were […] common among a large class of the artisan population' and reflects 'the prevailing opinions of the people'. *The Glasgow Infant School Magazine*, February 1832, pp. 37-42; *The Glasgow Infant School Magazine*, March 1832, pp. 63-70; *The Glasgow Infant School Magazine*, April 1832, pp. 79-92; William Fraser, *Memoir of the Life of David Stow, Founder of the Training System of Education* (London: James Nisbet, 1868), p. 95.
[31] *A Conversation between a Lady and a Cottager, upon the Advantages of Infant Schools*, 2nd edn (London: C. & J. Rivington, 1828); *Friendly Advice*, pp. 122-41; *The Cottager's Monthly Visitor*, August 1830, pp. 352-54; G. Stocks, *The Infant School; or, A Dialogue between Mary and Susan; on the Duty of Parents*, 2nd edn (Uxbridge: H.G. Cosier, [1841]).
[32] Patricia Crawford, *Parents of Poor Children in England, 1580-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 121.

the morning and not returning until they were in bed at night, women with young families were more likely to remain in and around the home. Mothers dressed, washed, and fed their infants. They dropped the youngest infants off at school, collecting them at dinnertime and at the end of the school day.[33] When teachers wished to discuss a child's attendance or behaviour, they usually summoned mothers to the schools or visited mothers at home.[34] Much of the responsibility for instructing and disciplining infants fell on maternal shoulders, for it was mothers who had the most contact with their children. It is little wonder then that women complained about teachers' methods much more often than fathers did. Indeed, some mothers may have felt that, as women, they were much better qualified to judge what was in infants' interests than were male educationalists and teachers.

Mothers took a much more hands-on role than fathers with respect to their children's schooling, just as they did with immunisation. However, educationalists were not as fixated on plebeian women as charity vaccinators were. Educationalists were concerned with the moral health of plebeian families as a whole. They were eager that mothers and fathers alike set a good example for their offspring. Educationalists conceived of vice in gendered terms. While they believed women were prone to be quarrelsome and slovenly, men were thought susceptible to drunkenness, violence, and gambling. If women's bad habits resulted in domestic chaos, men's habits might have far worse effects. Fathers' destructive behaviour could break familiar bonds of trust and affection and severely compromise financial security. Educationalists believed that immorality and indigence went hand-in-hand; bad habits bred pauperism. Early infant schools were intended for children from the poorest — and most dissipated— families in London. The schools were often located in slum districts where poor families could readily access them. However, as will be shown, in practice the infant schools encountered many different gradations of poverty, ranging from people living on the margins of subsistence to artisanal families bordering on the middle class.

[33] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 144-45.
[34] Ibid., pp. 152-53.

Agency and the Economy of Makeshifts

The founders of infant schools aspired to civilise poor children, to offer an alternative to the 'education in filthy habits […] immoral conduct and gaming and drinking' that children received on the streets.[35] Like many early nineteenth-century charities, infant schools aimed to bring order to what philanthropists perceived as chaotic plebeian lives. However, plebeian parents did not share the priorities of educationalists. Facing insecure economic circumstances, many parents found infant schools too 'whimsical' and unhurried to adequately equip children to cope with the pressing demands of poverty.[36] Impoverished families relied on the 'economy of makeshifts', yet this flexible and creative approach to survival clashed with educationalists' insistence on regularity. Plebeian parents exercised their agency by privileging their own needs. They pressured teachers to accommodate their desires, used the charities 'against the grain', or else enrolled their children in private dame schools.

In contrast to schools for older children, early infant schools placed little emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Infant school educationalists argued that moral instruction was of much more immediate importance. Children could learn to read and write at any age, but their characters could only be shaped in infancy. Infant school educationalists also largely rejected the 'parrot system' of rote learning which was common in many charitable schools.[37] They argued that children often had very little understanding of the facts they memorised. If their minds and consciences were to be shaped, children had to be actively involved in their own learning. Infant school educationalists embraced the notion that infants were tactile by nature and learned best when their senses were stimulated.[38] Educationalists insisted that lessons ought to be fun, taking advantage of children's curiosity and love of novelty. The infant school routine was punctuated with song, dance, and play. Idealistic images in educational manuals depict schools stocked with wooden blocks, swings, maps,

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[35] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 34.
[36] *Friendly Advice*, p. 124.
[37] Samuel Wilderspin, *A System for the Education of the Young, Applied to All the Faculties; Founded on Immense Experience on Many Thousands of Children, in Most Parts of the Three Kingdoms* (London: James S. Hodson, 1840), pp. xiv, 231.
[38] The theories of Emanuel Swedenborg, Johann Pestalozzi, and John Locke influenced the ideas of infant school educationalists. McCann and Young, pp. 148, 151.

pictures, musical instruments, and abacuses (Figs 3 and 4).[39] It is unlikely that most schools were able to afford the full range of equipment featured in these images, yet most early infant schools invested in learning aides, for these were a key component of the Infant System. This equipment not only stimulated the senses, but was designed to provide opportunities for experiential learning. By taking turns on the swings, infants practiced sharing and patience.[40] Wilderspin planted trees in the garden of Spitalfields Infant School and forbade the scholars from picking the fruit, thus encouraging them to exercise self-restraint and show respect for private property.[41]

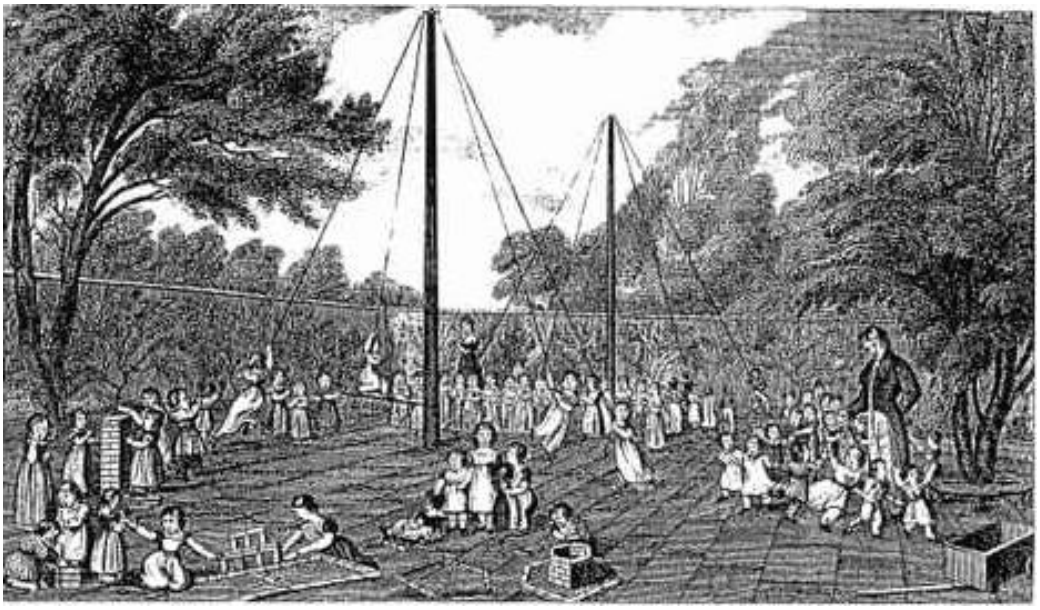

Fig. 3 An idealised image of an infant school playground, from Samuel Wilderspin's *A System for the Education of the Young* (1840)

This playful approach to learning did not sit well with many plebeian parents. Mothers frequently voiced their disapproval. On one occasion, when women learned that their infants had spent their day at the Spitalfields Infant School pretending to be ducks, they complained that they wanted their children to 'learn [their] book and not to play at such nonsense' and many withdrew their infants from

[39] Wilderspin, *System for the Education*, frontispiece; D.G. Goyder, *A Manual of the System of Instruction Pursued at the Infant School, Meadow Street, Bristol*, 4th edn (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), end matter.
[40] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 55-57.
[41] Ibid., pp. 91, 137-38.

the school.[42] Educationalists alleged that poor parents were too ignorant and too suspicious of novelty to appreciate the enlightened principles of the infant school. Thomas Dick observed that parents were:

> unqualified for appreciating *intellectual* instruction and moral ideas, and have no higher ideas of the progress of education, than what arise from the circumstance of their children being transferred from one book to another; and hence, they frequently complain, that their children are learning nothing, because no *tasks* are assigned them, and no books put into their hands[43]

Many plebeian parents valued reading and writing above moral instruction. They believed literacy would serve their children well in the workplace. Moreover, in an increasingly literate world, parents did not wish their children to feel ashamed or socially isolated because they were not able to read or write.[44] Literacy was particularly important if the poor were to successfully navigate opportunities in London, a large city in which print abounded. Many educationalists assumed that infant scholars would graduate to day schools at the age of seven, where greater emphasis would be placed on book learning. However, many parents could not afford to keep their children in school for so long. As Wally Seccombe notes, the poor viewed education as 'a short term investment in basic literacy skills'.[45] To many parents, it was a waste to spend a child's scant opportunity for instruction on play rather than on acquiring useful skills.

Plebeian characters in infant school dialogue tracts frequently complain about the schools' curriculum. Susan Jones, the 'cottager' in *A Conversation between a Lady and a Cottager upon the Advantages of Infant School* argues that she does not like the infant schools because they do not focus on literacy. She takes great pride in her son, ordering him to read and spell aloud to show off what he has learned under the local dame's instruction.[46] Like Susan Jones, many poor parents demanded concrete evidence of their children's progress, both to assure themselves that their time and money had been well spent and to impress their neighbours. The 'moral character' and 'understanding' which infant school teachers cultivated in children may have seemed insubstantial and impractical for

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[42] McCann and Young, p. 16; Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, p. 25.
[43] Thomas Dick, *On the Mental Illumination and Moral Improvement of Mankind; or, An Inquiry into the Means by Which a General Diffusion of Knowledge and Moral Principle May Be Promoted* (Philadelphia: Key & Biddle, 1836), pp. 125-26.
[44] Wally Seccombe, *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline* (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 104-05.
[45] Ibid., p. 103.
[46] *Conversation between a Lady*, pp. 5-7.

families struggling daily with the very concrete concerns of survival. Wilderspin related the tale of two infant scholars who implored their mother to pray when she could not find anything for them to eat. She responded: 'Do not trouble me about praying, I want to get something for you to eat, and praying won't feed your bellies'.[47] Many mothers favoured the dame schools because they brought tangible results: pieces of knitting, sewing samplers, and demonstrable skills in reading and writing. Mothers reportedly told Wilderspin that they would send their children to 'Mrs So-and-so [a dame] for 3*d.* a week, where [they] will learn sewing and knitting, and so on'.[48] Plebeian parents exercised agency in choosing to reject charity that did not fulfill their needs.

Infant schools were large institutions. In 1835 Wilderspin estimated that there was an average of one hundred infants in London infant schools.[49] This number paled in comparison to the city's largest charitable day schools, some of which had more than five hundred pupils.[50] However, infant schools dwarfed the dame schools that typically catered to only a dozen or so children. Infant schools also had a much larger pupil-to-teacher ratio than the dame schools. Most infant schools had a staff of only one or two teachers.[51] In 1834 a schoolmistress and her assistant cared for one hundred infants at St Mary's Infant School in Walthamstow, while the parish's fifteen dame schools had a combined total of two hundred scholars, an average of thirteen children per school.[52]

Infant school teachers had several techniques for managing large numbers of children. They trained the children to sit, stand, march, and fall silent on cue.[53] Some schools arranged children on tiered galleries, allowing teachers to see and to be seen by all pupils.[54] While at times the school body acted as one mass, there were more intimate learning opportunities. For some lessons, students were divided into classes. The teacher assigned an advanced pupil to lead each class in their lessons. This

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[47] Wilderspin claimed that the children's earnest prayers eventually made the mother contrite. Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 36-37.
[48] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 23.
[49] Ibid., p. 26.
[50] Pamela Silver and Harold Silver, *The Education of the Poor: The History of a National School, 1824-1974* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 35.
[51] Wilderspin claimed that two teachers could manage two hundred infants. HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 14.
[52] HCPP, Select Committee on Education of People of England and Wales, 1834 (572), IX.1, p. 167.
[53] William Wilson, *A Manual of Instruction for Infants' Schools; with a Particular Reference to the Subsequent Instruction of the Children in Parochial Schools* (London: George Wilson, 1829), p. 12.
[54] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 59.

'monitorial' or 'mutual instruction' system was a prominent feature of charitable schools for older children.[55] Despite these techniques, however, infant schools could be very loud. Visitors to infant schools in London were struck by scenes of 'uproarious mirth'.[56]

Infant school teachers insisted that a 'noisy cheerfulness' was desirable at times, for they believed that children learned best when they were entertained. William Wilson of St Mary's Infant School claimed that there could be '*order without silence*'.[57] Some parents, however, believed that exuberance was incompatible with disciplined learning. Working-class parents in dialogues complain that the schools do not keep children quiet. A grandmother in one tract declares on seeing the infant scholars assembled: 'there's sic a croud i' this place, just like a cried fair'.[58] Techniques for managing children seemed inadequate to some parents. The monitorial system was particularly unpopular. Mothers feared that monitors bullied younger children or they resented that one child was promoted above another.[59] Yet, perhaps the greatest objection to mutual instruction was that it deprived infants of quality teaching. Monitors, who were at most a few years older than their charges, were believed to be poor substitutes for the attention of qualified instructors. There were concerns, too, that monitors also suffered, their own education neglected because they were too busy attending younger scholars.[60] The educational reformer Thomas Wyse noted that the poor considered monitors as 'a scheming devise of the teacher to shift the burthen from his own indolent shoulders, to those of others'.[61] For

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[55] Silver and Silver, 35-36.

[56] *The Leeds Mercury*, 31 July 1824; Frederic Hill, *National Education; Its Present State and Prospects*, 2 vols (London: Charles Knight, 1836), I, p. 192.

[57] Wilson argued: '*There may be order without silence*. The mode of instruction, indeed, requires frequent excitement among the children; and moreover, the best energies of nature would be destroyed, and an early dislike to the acquirement of knowledge and good habits induced, if even a noisy cheerfulness were suppressed in a school of this character'. The emphasis is present in the original text. Wilson, *Manual of Instruction*, p. 11, p. 235.

[58] *The Glasgow Infant School Magazine*, February 1832, p. 41. See also *Conversation between a Lady*, p. 11.

[59] The educationalist Robert Sullivan wrote in 1842 that the monitorial system had 'never been popular' with parents, claiming that it 'hurt [parents'] pride […] to have their children instructed and *governed* by the children of their neighbours'. Robert Sullivan, *Lectures and Letters on Popular Education, Including a Translation of M. Guizot's Celebrated Letter to the Primary Teachers of France* (Dublin: William Curry, Jun., 1842), p. 56. See also HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 184.

[60] The Spitalfields Infant School acknowledged that monitors were 'complete drudges; each monitor having to teach twenty, or more children, to spell one hundred words each, every morning, besides keeping them in order, and doing other things'. To get children to act as monitors, the teacher was compelled to give monitors a penny each week, even though infant school educationalists generally disapproved of bribing children. Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 59-60. See also *The Cottager's Monthly Visitor*, September 1830, p. 415.

[61] Thomas Wyse, *Education Reform; or, The Necessity of a National System of Education* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836), p. 208. See also Wilderspin, *System*, p. 269.

parents who were anxious to have their infants learn as quickly as possible, the Infant System appeared highly inefficient.

Parents who believed that the Infant System did not meet their educational priorities often exercised their agency by requesting teachers amend their practices. Some teachers, such as Wilderspin, absolutely refused to institute changes. However, by the 1830s, it had become obvious that many infant schools were offering an education which was more in line with parental demands. Newly established infant schools concentrated increasingly on book learning, to the neglect of moral instruction. Some institutions employed rote learning in preference to interactive lessons. The devaluation of play was made clear by the fact that many new schools dispensed with the playground that Wilderspin deemed an essential component of infant education.[62] Historians attribute this shift in approach to the absence of a central authority on infant education and to schools' straightened financial circumstances. Although several infant school societies were established in the mid-1820s, competition between them ensured that that none had deciding control over the direction of infant education.[63] Cash-strapped schools often could not invest in educational equipment, nor could they afford to hire or train well-qualified teachers.[64] As a result, many infant schools diverted from the principles of the Infant System.

However, plebeian parents may also have influenced this transformation, a role historians have not acknowledged. Educationalists observed that parents cajoled teachers into adopting a curriculum based on literacy and that weak schoolmasters 'yield[ed] to the ignorant prejudices of parents, who wish "learning" for their money'.[65] At times, parents may have found that teachers, school governors, and donors were amenable to their demands. Some teachers found it easier to manage children with books and rote learning than with sensory activities.[66] Visitors to the schools enjoyed hearing children recite text aloud, while some instructors welcomed the opportunity to

[62] McCann and Young, pp. 169-70.
[63] Ibid., pp. 74-81.
[64] Ibid., pp. 171-75.
[65] W. Chambers and R. Chambers, *Infant Education from Two to Six Years of Age. Applicable to the Infant School and the Nursery*, 4th edn (Edinburgh: William and Robert Chambers, 1837), p. 109; *Central Society*, p. 235; *The Educational Magazine*, October 1835, p. 295.
[66] *The Educational Magazine*, October 1835, p. 294.

demonstrate their pupils' skills (and their own teaching prowess) in this way.[67] London infant schools competed against dame schools for pupils and against other charities for subscriptions. In order to attract donations, infant schools may have made concessions to parents, for empty classrooms would certainly fail to impress potential subscribers. As Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker argue, plebeian actions in pursuit of short-term goals could have much wider effects, potentially shaping the nature of institutions.[68]

Infant school educationalists aspired to introduce routine and order into plebeian families. Teachers insisted that infants attend school regularly, arriving on time with clean faces and short hair. Because young children were not capable of readying themselves for school without assistance, teachers directed their instructions particularly at mothers. Educationalists hoped that regulations would encourage parents to take greater pride in their children's appearance and conduct. However, the rules did not find favour among many parents, particularly those on the lowest reaches of the social ladder. The lives of the poorest infant scholars were marked by instability and deprivation. One mother who sent two infants to the Spitalfields Infant School laboured alone to support her four children, for her violent husband drank away his wages.[69] District visitors described another family that used an infant school in 1832; the father had hardly any work, the mother was heavily pregnant, and several of the children were ill.[70] Such impoverished parents were likely the same people who reportedly held an 'apathetic' attitude towards vaccination.[71] Regular school attendance and cleanliness, like immunisation, were not priorities for families in desperate circumstances. The insecurity of plebeian employment meant that families often lived peripatetic lives, pursuing short-lived opportunities and staying one step ahead of destitution. Josiah Basset was born into 'abject poverty' in London. His ailing father did not make enough money selling firewood to pay the rent,

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[67] Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 251-52.
[68] Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 18.
[69] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 125-26.
[70] *The Fourth Annual Report of the General Society for Promoting District Visiting. To Which Is Prefixed, A Sermon, Preached on Behalf of the Institution* (London: A. Macintosh, 1832), p. 33.
[71] Wilderspin observed that during the five years he spent at the Quaker Street School, he had 'only heard of three children dying of [smallpox], and those had never been vaccinated. I always made a point of inquiring, on the admission of a child, whether this operation had been performed, and if not, I strongly recommended that it should. If the parents spoke the truth, I had but few children in the school who had not been vaccinated'. Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 130.

forcing the family to constantly move lodgings. This lifestyle was not conducive to regular school attendance and Josiah attended five schools in 'a short time'.[72]

Educationalists suggested that infants could not make a significant contribution to the family income. However, they underestimated infants' role in the economy of makeshifts. In spite of their youth, infants could run errands, rock babies, and carry items to the pawnbroker's.[73] Young children could also assist their parents by begging or committing petty theft.[74] Many families found that their infants were better employed out of school than in. The clothing requirements of infant schools were also incompatible with the economic circumstances of impoverished families. Parents frequently claimed that they could not send their children to school because they could not afford shoes or clothing.[75] Some commentators alleged that such claims were ruses to extract material goods from the benevolent, but many parents likely found it genuinely difficult to afford clothing.[76] It is probable that parents considered clothing infants a lower priority than clothing older children and adults, whose work took them outside the home. Many families engaged in a weekly cycle of moving items in and out of pawn, with the result that clothing was not always available to be worn for school.[77] Clothing was often sold when families hit hard times, requiring their erstwhile wearers to remain indoors; district visitors reported seeing children in naked or near-naked states.[78] If infants were lucky enough to have clothing, it was often only a single outfit. Mothers therefore had little choice but to keep their infants from school if their clothing required washing or mending.[79] The philanthropist Sarah

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[72] Josiah Basset, *The Life of a Vagrant, or the Testimony of an Outcast to the Value and Truth of the Gospel* (London: Charles Gilpin, [1850]), p. 2.
[73] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 150; Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 33.
[74] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 19.
[75] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, pp. 53, 54.
[76] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 143; *Schools for the Industrious Classes; or, The Present State of Education among the Working People of England* (London: Taylor and Walton, 1837), p. 3.
[77] Alannah Tomkins, 'Pawnbroking and the Survival Strategies of the Urban Poor in 1770s York', in *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 166-98 (p. 178).
[78] See for example *Report of the Committee of the Benevolent, or Strangers' Friend Society; Instituted for the Purpose of Visiting and Relieving Sick and Distressed Strangers* (London: J. Butterworth and Son, 1817), pp. 38, 44, 49.
[79] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 51.

Trimmer noted that it was common for a mother to state: 'my dear babes are obliged to lie naked in that miserable straw bed, whilst I wash their linen'.[80]

Along with providing protection from the elements and preserving the wearer's dignity, clothing served as a marker of a mother's respectability and concern for her offspring. Many parents refused to send poorly attired children to school, lest they look ragged next to their better-dressed peers.[81] Meeting educationalists' demands for cleanliness was also difficult for poor mothers who lacked washing facilities or whose attention was torn between multiple children and their daily chores. When Wilderspin chastised mothers for sending their children to school in a dirty state, they responded that they did not have the time to attend to their infants' appearance.[82]

Some parents exercised their agency by using the schools 'against the grain'. Ignoring the regulations, they sent their children to school as and when they wished. Infants turned up to school late, or not at all. Attendance was often far from regular. Only twenty-six of the 213 children on the books of the Hackney Infant School in October 1827 were rewarded for their 'almost constant' attendance; the average daily attendance was only ninety-three children.[83] The number of scholars on infant school registers fluctuated as parents repeatedly enrolled and withdrew their children. At the Spitalfields Infant School in the early 1830s, some scholars attended for only a few weeks, while even the most settled children remained for an average of two years.[84] Children often appeared at school in a filthy state, without neat clothing, shoes, or stockings.[85] Such was the magnitude of these problems that teachers spent much of their energy combatting them. They distributed lists of rules plastered on heavy pasteboard so that parents would hang them on their wall instead of 'doubl[ing] them up and put[ting] them into their pockets'.[86] They threatened to turn children away if parents did not follow

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[80] Sarah Trimmer, *The Oeconomy of Charity; or, An Address to Ladies; Adapted to the Present State of Charitable Institutions in England*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson and F. and C. Rivington, 1801), II, pp. 111-12.
[81] Crawford, p. 123; HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 53.
[82] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 160-61.
[83] Poor attendance was not a problem which was specific to infant schools. Many other charitable schools had difficulty enforcing attendance. Sarah Lloyd shows that the pupils of the Welsh Charity School frequently missed school to pursue employment opportunities. SHL, notes on Hackney Infant School minute book, MS 975/62; Sarah Lloyd, '"Agents in Their Own Concerns?": Charity and the Economy of Makeshifts in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 100-36 (pp. 111-12).
[84] Hill, p. 190.
[85] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 160-61.
[86] Ibid., p. 36.

the rules and they devised special punishments for latecomers and the unwashed.[87] Teaching manuals are replete with songs promoting punctuality and cleanliness.[88] Some of the songs were evidently designed to be sung at home, for they addressed parents specifically. For example, 'On Going to School on Time', spurs parents to action with the lines: 'Come mother, wash my hands and face' and 'let me go before the bell/ Is rang at nine o'clock'.[89] Despite all these measures, it is likely that many parents disregarded the rules without significant consequences. Some teachers may have turned a blind eye to infractions, lest parents send their children to the dame schools instead, where regulations were not nearly so strict.[90] By not enforcing regulations, teachers also tacitly acknowledged the scale of the problems they faced. They would soon find their classrooms empty if they expelled every child who turned up to school late or dirty.

In the early 1820s, many infant schools began charging parents a penny or two per child per week. In part, these fees were intended to shore up schools' income, for subscriptions from the public were unreliable. Yet, there were further reasons for the fees. Critics like Reverend Stone argued that free schooling allowed parents to shirk their responsibility to raise their children. By getting parents to contribute towards their children's schooling, philanthropists hoped to avoid this criticism and encourage industry in parents. More importantly, however, educationalists projected that fees would remove the stigma of charity from the schools; parents would consequently value the schools more and would take greater pains with respect to attendance and cleanliness.[91] Some charitable day schools in London had charged nominal fees in the early 1810s. Although by 1816 many of these schools had discovered that poor parents were unable or unwilling to pay, in 1819 Henry Brougham

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[87] *Third Report of the Committee of the City of London Infant Schools* (London: R. Clay, 1833), p. 12; Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 36, 162.
[88] [Thomas Bilby], *A Course of Lessons, Together with the Tunes, to Which They Are Usually Sung in Infant Schools, and Also a Copious Collection of Hymns and Moral Songs*, 3rd edn (London: J., G., & F. Rivington, 1836), pp. 43, 84; Goyder, *Manual of the System*, p. 152.
[89] James Rodgers, *A Practical Treatise on Infant Education; Being an Entire Plan for Organizing and Conducting Infant Schools; with the Various Methods of Discipline Connected with Its Progress* (London: Hatchard and Son, [1833]), p. 93.
[90] Wilderspin permitted parents to keep their infants at home on occasion to rock babies. Some infant schools only penalised parents who repeatedly broke the rules. One set of school rules suggested that children should be expelled only if they were 'absent three days, or late in coming for one week without leave, or a satisfactory excuse'. Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 150; Chambers and Chambers, p. 36.
[91] T. Bilby and R.B. Ridgway, *The Infant Teacher's Assistant, for the Use of Schools and Private Families; or, Scriptural and Moral Lessons for Infants*, 3rd edn (London: Widow Tilling, 1834), p. 167.

boasted that the Westminster Day Asylum would 'soon likely to be supported by the interest of those who were immediately benefitted by its existence'.[92] He anticipated that, as the infant schools were 'conducted on a better plan' than the dame schools, 'parents would naturally rather pay quarter-pence to the one than to the other'.[93]

The introduction of fees into London infant schools met with mixed results. The masters of the Chelsea and Hart Street schools reported that fees overcame the reticence of parents to enrol their children and the institutions 'prospered' in consequence.[94] While some parents removed their children from St Mary's Infant School when it introduced fees, the schoolmaster reported that most eventually returned to the fold. He noted that, since the introduction of fees, enrolled scholars had attended with greater consistency.[95] In 1833 the City of London Infant School reported that its school fees were 'punctually and thankfully made'.[96] Many schools that reported success with fees were not located in the poorest districts of the metropolis. Indeed, some commentators noted that the schools that charged fees tended to attract 'children of a better order', the offspring of artisans or even the lower middle class.[97] Plebeian parents with some financial capital could afford to pay school fees and may have been eager to prove their respectability by sending their children to a fee-paying infant school, rather than a free charity school.

By contrast, the most deprived families in London —those for whom the schools had been established— did not welcome the fees. P.L.H. Higgins, who established an infant school in Hackney, observed that collecting fees was difficult.[98] The minute book from the Hackney Infant School reveals that pence payments were often in arrears.[99] Mr Brown, schoolmaster at the Spitalfields Infant School during the early 1830s, noticed an improvement in the attendance of some pupils, but this was tempered by the fact that between twenty and thirty children were withdrawn from the school and

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[92] HCPP, Select Committee on Education of Lower Orders of Metropolis, 1816 (427), IV.5, pp. 2, 8, 103, 188, 190, 232, 253; HCPP, Commons Sitting of 19 December 1819, cc. 1189-217.
[93] HCPP, Commons Sitting of 19 December 1819, cc. 1189-217.
[94] Bilby and Ridgway, p. 167.
[95] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1834, p. 167.
[96] *Third Report of the Committee*, p. 9.
[97] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 141; James Simpson, *The Philosophy of Education, with Its Practical Application to a System and Plan of Popular Education as a National Object*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1836), p. 159.
[98] Higgins, pp. 26-27.
[99] SHL, notes on Hackney Infant School minute book, MS 975/62.

many more parents were deterred from enrolling their infants in the first place.[100] Some schools in slum districts noted that they attracted 'respectable' children who resided at a distance, but that the poor children in the schools' immediate vicinity remained aloof. [101] The governors of some schools reduced their fees when they found parents did not pay the amount initially charged.[102] Far from adhering more strictly to attendance regulations, some poor parents merely changed their makeshift strategies when fees were introduced. The educationalist James Simpson observed that parents racked up debts at a school but, rather than pay what they owed, they withdrew their children and placed them in a different institution, where they repeated the process.[103] Another teacher, Mr Stow, noted that if a child missed school due to illness on a Monday, her mother would often keep her at home for the remainder of the week. This was simply so that the mother did not pay a weekly fee for less than a full week's instruction.[104] Although Simpson and Stow observed these behaviours in Scotland, it is likely that London parents behaved in a similar manner.

Fees did not distract plebeian parents from the fact that the infant schools suited middle-class priorities more so than their own. Some parents evidently believed that it was they who were doing their benefactors a favour by submitting their children to the Infant System.[105] A writer for the *Edinburgh Review* wrote that parents:

> expect, as a right, what their richer neighbours give in charity, and almost think, that whoever volunteers his services in their behalf, has a personal interest in their good, and should pay for his fancy. They see that rich men are at the bottom of the establishment, and they are resolved, that those who must pay the greatest part of the charge at all events, should be made to pay the whole[106]

The radical reformer Archibald Prentice argued that the poor were unwilling to pay for what they viewed as 'a new thing proceeding from the rich without consultation with the poor' and were

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[100] Hill, p. 190; HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 23.
[101] *The Educational Magazine*, July 1835, p. 50; HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 32.
[102] Pole, p. 8; *Report of the Committee of the Infant School of St Paul's District, Islington; Also a List of the Subscribers and Donors* (London: [n. pub.], 1830), p. 8.
[103] Simpson, pp. 161, 229.
[104] David Stow, *The Training System of Education, for the Moral and Intellectual Elevation of Youth, Especially in Large Towns and Manufacturing Villages*, 7th edn (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1846), p. 265.
[105] Wilderspin wrote that a parent thought it a 'favour to let [schools] have his child on any terms'. This attitude was also reported in other schools. Richard Cannon, treasurer of the Kennington National Schools, reflected that 'the parents […] seemed to think they were conferring a favor on the subscribers by sending their children to the schools'. *Educational Magazine*, July 1835, pp. 50-51; Silver and Silver, p. 42.
[106] *The Edinburgh Review*, May 1823, p. 444.

suspicious that the infant schools, like the charity schools that had preceded them, were merely attempts to make the poor servile to the rich.[107] Prentice believed that plebeian parents wanted a voice in how their children were educated. The poor did not wish to be acted on, entirely subject to direction from above, but to assume some control over their situation. The fees were an attempt to get parents to take ownership of and pride in the Infant System. Yet, to many parents, it was ridiculous to pay for an education that was not designed to meet their needs.

To the immense frustration of educationalists, parents continued to patronise the dame schools in large numbers, despite the fact that these private ventures charged fees that were as much as six times greater than those of the infant schools.[108] The previous chapter has shown how parents exercised the agency of choice by seeking out variolation rather than charitable vaccination. Medical men viewed this choice as dangerous, for they believed that variolation had the potential to spread disease among the population. Educationalists similarly claimed that parents' choice of dame schooling posed a public threat. They argued that dame schools allowed immorality to flourish, encouraging crime and civil unrest. However, dame schools offered considerable attractions to working-class parents; they had to do so if they were to survive amongst the scores of other schools in the metropolis.[109] Unlike infant schools, the dame schools tolerated absences and untidy scholars. Poor parents expected to hold some influence over the dame-school curriculum:

> As a part of the privilege connected with being able to pay for their children's schooling, each mother considers herself entitled to prescribe the system of education to be pursued […] it is the old woman's daily endeavour to adapt herself to all these various and perplexing requirements, and in every instance to produce exactly the job that her customers choose[110]

There was greater agency in being a customer than a recipient of charity.

The chapter on vaccine charities has shown that the vastness of the urban medical marketplace enabled plebeian parents to exercise the agency of choice. Some medical men believed

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[107] Archibald Prentice, *Historical Sketches and Personal Recollections of Manchester. Intended to Illustrate the Progress of Public Opinion from 1792 to 1832* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1851), p. 340.
[108] *The Edinburgh Review*, May 1823, p. 444.
[109] Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 357-58; Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Working-Class Demand and the Growth of English Elementary Education, 1750-1850', in *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education*, ed. by Lawrence Stone (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 192-205 (pp. 198-99).
[110] *Visitor; or, Monthly Instructor*, p. 369.

that weakened ties of social obligation in the city gave Londoners freedom to make their own decisions. Urban parents reportedly did not feel any obligation to their neighbours to isolate their infectious children and vaccine charities dispensed with the recommendation system of charity, allowing parents to obtain charity independent of their social betters. Similar conditions allowed plebeian parents to pursue their own educational choices. Wilderspin observed that Owen's infant school at New Lanark had 'not one tenth part the difficulties' that he encountered in London.[111] In the self-contained model village of New Lanark, Owen held a virtual stranglehold on the provision of schooling. Bound by their employment to Owen and with few schooling alternatives, the parents of New Lanark had little choice but to submit to Owen's plan.[112] In contrast, London parents did not feel indebted to the philanthropists who backed the infant schools. They 'assume[d] an air of independence' and 'unless the mode of teaching [met] their approbation, they [would] not send their children at all to school'.[113] The scope for choice in the metropolis allowed plebeian parents to exercise a significant degree of autonomy.

The Agency of Infants

The founders of infant schools anticipated that children would enter the schools shortly after they had learned to walk and had been weaned, at about eighteen months, and would remain until seven years of age. It might be assumed that such young children were under the complete control of the adults in their lives, but this was far from the case. Like their parents, infant scholars exercised their agency by pursuing their own priorities. Infant schools aimed to cultivate cheerful, loving, pious, obedient, and honest infants. Many infant-school educationalists, influenced by their Swedenborgian or Evangelical faiths, believed that Christians had to internalise religious teachings if they were to be

[111] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 179-80.
[112] Owen noted that, on setting up his infant school, he had had some difficulty convincing parents that infants would benefit from education; however, Owen claimed that this difficulty was soon overcome as parents witnessed the effects of infant instruction. Owen, *Life*, pp. 134-35.
[113] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 179-80.

saved.[114] Virtue could not be imposed on children by force; children had to actively embrace virtue. The evangelical schoolmaster Charles Mayo described the role of infant-school teachers:

> They must set out the individual in the right course, and put a light in his hand which shall guide him in his advances. They must invest him with a power, by which he shall feel himself able to seek out his own happiness —the power of reason, of mind, of principle[115]

Educationalists claimed that children were agents in their own moral development. Instructors might point children in the way they should go, explaining Christian principles and providing opportunities for scholars to put them into practice, but ultimately only the children themselves could 'seek out [their] own happiness' and embrace God in their lives. The infant schools encouraged children to play an active role in their own education. Teachers hoped that children would attend school willingly, enticed by the amusements of the classroom and playground. Through play and conversation, infants were to discover the value of virtue for themselves.

Influenced by Locke and other writers, educationalists claimed that harsh physical chastisement produced only a 'sullen submission to power and authority' in children.[116] Whipping made children behave out of fear of the consequences, not out of a heartfelt desire to do good. They also disapproved of rewards. They believed that, while it was possible to bribe children to obey, rewards left the conscience untouched. Infant school teachers doled out corporal punishments and rewards sparingly, if at all.[117] Instead of controlling behaviour extrinsically, infant schools encouraged children to be agents in their own moral regulation. Teachers conversed with their pupils on moral subjects, cultivating infants' rational ability to distinguish right from wrong. In some schools, teachers put miscreants on 'trial'. Scholars acted as the jury, deciding whether the defendant had behaved

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[114] McCann and Young, p. 56.
[115] Charles Mayo, *Observations on the Establishment and Direction of Infant Schools; Being the Substance of a Lecture Delivered at the Royal Institution, May, 1826*, quoted in *The Teacher's Guide and Parent's Assistant, Devoted to the Interests of Common Education*, October 1828, p. 135.
[116] Pole, pp. 44-45.
[117] In their rejection of corporal punishment, educationalists reflected developments in penal reform. Bodily punishments such as whipping and branding fell out of favour in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and schemes for reforming criminals emerged. Greg T. Smith, 'Civilized People Don't Want to See That Sort of Thing: The Decline of Physical Punishment in London, 1760-1840', in *Qualities of Mercy: Justice, Punishment, and Discretion*, ed. by Carolyn Strange (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), pp. 21-51 (pp. 39-40).

badly and, if so, what the punishment should be.[118] These trials encouraged infants to take ownership of the infant schools' moral code.

Parents frequently thwarted teachers' plans for cultivating moral agency in their charges. Educationalists noted with disapproval that many plebeian parents used physical correction. Wilderspin described the misery that violent (and usually drunken) fathers inflicted on their children.[119] The governors of one school so disapproved of the discipline children received at home that they discussed the issue in an address to parents. In it, they claimed that they:

> sometimes heard from the lips of Parents […] such violent expressions as the following: —'If you do not mind what I say, I'll knock you down flat upon the floor, or I'll break your bones, I'll beat you as long as I can stand over you, or I'll cut you in pieces,' &c. And how many passionate and very injurious blows have been given to children by their parents! […] It is the christian duty of all parents in the management of their children, never to suffer anger to get the upper hand of their reason and judgment[120]

The product of passion and not reason, corporal punishment was not proportionate to the offence. In the eyes of educationalists, parents who inflicted corporal punishment were themselves undisciplined, having lost control rather than gained it.

Patricia Crawford and Joanne Bailey argue that there was great variability in the way in which plebeian parents disciplined their children.[121] On the opposite extreme of the disciplinary spectrum from the strict disciplinarians were the 'indulgent' parents. While some parents pushed their infants to succeed academically, others believed that infants should be free from such pressures. A parent in a dialogue reflects this view; he proclaims that it is 'a downright shame to tie a boy to its book as soon as it is able to walk' and 'that the schools produce 'puny meagre-faced little things […] debarred from all the privileges of their age'.[122] The poorest parents may have seen infancy as the sole window of opportunity for carefree pursuits before the struggle for subsistence began in earnest. It is also possible that the Rousseauian notion that children ought to have a free and natural upbringing may have trickled down to plebeian parents who bordered on middle class. Some parents believed that infants

[118] Rodgers, pp. 45-46; Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, p. 161.
[119] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 88.
[120] Pole, p. 68.
[121] Crawford, pp. 144-45; Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 87-89.
[122] *Friendly Advice*, pp. 124, 125.

were too young to benefit from correction, or that bribing children was an effective means of securing their obedience.[123]

Teachers implored parents to 'cheerfully submit their Children to the governance of the Master or Mistress, and not interfere with their management' or 'interfere with the Discipline'.[124] That such instructions were necessary suggests that parents did not always passively accept infant school measures. Some parents requested teachers to whip their children.[125] One mother presented herself at the Spitalfields Infant School with the intention of beating her son in front of the other children, a punishment that she believed would 'shame him out of' his light-fingered habits.[126] 'Indulgent' parents sometimes allowed (and even encouraged) infants to attend fairs instead of school, or gave them holidays for good behaviour.[127] Some schools reported thin attendance on Fridays and Saturdays; this may be because parents wanted to give their children more leisure than that afforded on the Sabbath.[128] When children fussed about attending school, some mothers allowed them to remain at home or bribed them with apples and pennies.[129] Childrearing practices at home also compromised the Infant System. Wilderspin grumbled that some parents failed to follow through after threatening their children with consequences for their behaviour. As a result, these infants did not take the schoolmaster's warnings seriously and 'view[ed] his words as mere vapour'.[130] Wilderspin claimed that, by not exerting their authority, parents gave their children scope to exert a rebellious and manipulative agency. By contrast, harsh punitive measures stifled children's agency, making them withdrawn and subdued. Educationalists claimed that children who were beaten or threatened at home or at dame schools often viewed infant school teachers with fear, as they associated adults with punishment.[131] Teachers found it difficult to establish trust and friendship with scholars who so distrusted them or get them to participate in classroom activities.

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[123] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 121.
[124] Pole, pp. 67, 83.
[125] Goyder, *Manual of the System*, p. 114; Pole, p. 46.
[126] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 116.
[127] Ibid., pp. 190-91.
[128] D.G. Goyder, *A Manual: Detailing the System of Instruction, Pursued at the Infant School, Bristol* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1823), p. 44.
[129] Stocks, pp. 4-5; Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 144-45.
[130] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 17.
[131] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 117, 166.

It was not only parents who refused to conform to the infant schools' system of moral instruction. Infant school spaces were carefully designed to direct scholars' energies into channels that educationalists thought appropriate. The tiered galleries, for example, theoretically focused children's attention so that a single teacher could control more than one hundred children (Fig. 4).[132] The gallery design is reminiscent of the Panopticon —a circular institution with an observation house at the centre— that emphasised seeing and being seen.[133]

Educationalists directed teachers to maintain a constant supervisory presence, even in the playground. However, the descriptions and depictions of well-ordered classrooms that appear in teaching manuals should be viewed with some scepticism. It was an extremely difficult task for teachers to maintain control, especially in schools where there were there were a hundred infants (some of whom were only eighteen months old) for every teacher. Evidence from some sources, particularly school minute books, suggests that the reality often bore little resemblance to the ideal. Children did not necessarily direct their energy into the 'correct' channels. The governors of the Hackney Infant School expelled Joseph Fern for 'excessive crying' and reported that many of the children were 'dirty and unmanageable'.[134] Infants threw tantrums, quarrelled, told lies, and stole from one another. School equipment was not always employed as teachers intended. The educationalist David Goyder banned '[w]hips, whip-tops, peg-tops and ropes of any description' from his school because the children took to 'converting them into means of inflicting castigation on each other'.[135] A water trough installed at Quaker Street School to encourage cleanliness had the exact opposite effect as the children drenched themselves playing in it.[136]

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[132] For more on the architecture of infant schools see Thomas A. Markus, *Buildings and Power: Freedom and Control in the Origin of Modern Building Types* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 69-85.
[133] However, the infant school gallery, unlike a true Panopticon, allowed two-way observation. The teachers could see the pupils and the pupils see the teacher.
[134] SHL, notes on Hackney Infant School minute book, MS 975/62.
[135] Goyder, *Manual: Detailing*, p. 39.
[136] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 77.

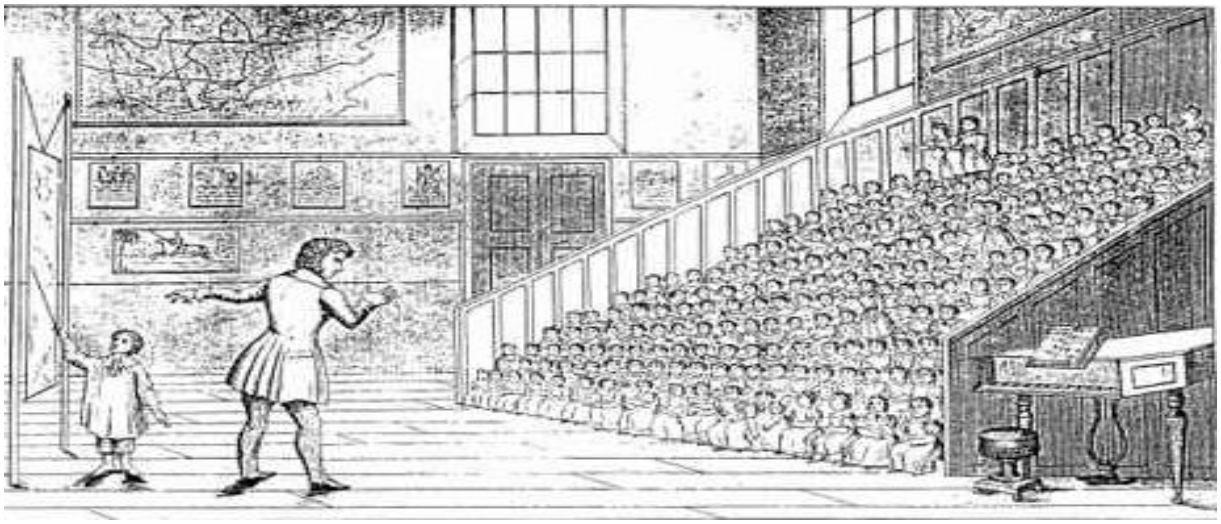

Fig. 4 An idealised image of a gallery lesson in progress, from Samuel Wilderspin's *A System for the Education of the Young* (1840)

Many infants sought to escape the structured spaces of the infant school. Young as they were, infants regularly took the initiative to skip lessons. There were strategies for getting away with truancy. To account for their absence from school during school hours, some children told their parents that their teachers had dismissed them early and informed their teachers that their parents had ordered them to stay at home.[137] The Quaker Street school shut its doors against latecomers. This was designed to inconvenience mothers who did not send their children off to school on time. However, older children took advantage of the rule, purposely dawdling on the way to school so that they would not be admitted and could spend the day as they pleased.[138] Truants typically spent their stolen time on the streets, the very place where educationalists did not want them to be. On the streets, they pursued childhood pastimes that educationalists condemned as violent, destructive, and immoral. Educationalists subscribed to the Rousseauian notion that children have a natural communion with nature; they observed that infants were naturally fascinated by living things. They condemned animal cruelty, arguing that it was uncivilised and displayed a callous disregard for God's creations. They feared that abusing animals was a stepping stone to more heinous crimes. Children who became accustomed to inflicting pain on an animal would not hesitate to turn their violence on humans. However, working-class children did not necessarily view animals as sentient creatures that deserved

[137] Ibid., pp. 119-20, 149, 152-53.
[138] Ibid., p. 35.

their protection. They collected eggs and young birds from nests, threw stones at dogs, tied live mice to strings, and stuck pins in flies.[139] Wilderspin observed that 'it was a regular plan [among young children] to go to Smithfield and steal an ox, and make it wild by putting peas in its ears'.[140]

Educationalists were troubled by other childhood amusements. They believed that playing with buttons, marbles, or coins taught gambling habits.[141] Wilderspin argued that infants should not construct Guy Fawkes bonfires, attend fairs or pantomimes, or visit the orchards on the outskirts of the city. He claimed that these activities led children to thieve and destroy private property.[142] He also condemned the custom of children building miniature oyster-shell grottoes on the pavements and requesting pennies from passersby, for he insisted that it encouraged begging habits.[143] Educationalists hoped that their toys and games would entice children into the schools, yet truants showed a decided preference for the amusements of the street. Numerous songs in infant school manuals warn against truancy and skiving pursuits, suggesting that they were significant problems.[144]

Historian Mary Jo Maynes argues that, when examining children in the past, historians must consider how 'everyday activities embody historical agency'.[145] Infants did not formulate sophisticated arguments about their rights to roam the streets, nor did they engineer organised revolts against the infant schools. However, children's pursuit of their own priorities —fun and freedom from adult control— nonetheless challenged the Infant System of education. Truancy was such a persistent issue that, in desperation, some teachers set aside their ideological opposition to punishments that operated extrinsically on infants. Having found nothing else effective, Wilderspin physically corrected truants or attached green strips of fabric to their backs and directed them to walk about the room while their

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[139] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 124; Simpson, p. 217; Goyder, *Manual of the System*, p. 157.
[140] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 19.
[141] J.R. Brown, *An Essay on Infant Cultivation: with a Compendium of the Analytical Method of Instruction and Elliptical Plan of Teaching, Adopted at Spitalfields Infants' School* (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1828), pp. 15-16; Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 192; Goyder, *Manual of the System*, p. 108.
[142] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, pp. 158, 191, 194; Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, pp. 190-92.
[143] Grottos usually appeared on the streets between July and September, during the oyster season. Children collected discarded oyster shells and arranged them into structures which could reach several feet in height. Some grottos were adorned with moss, glass, and candles. *The New Sporting Magazine*, August 1832, p. 274; *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, 26 August 1826, p. 116.
[144] [Bilby], *Course of Lessons*, pp. 43, 84, 95.
[145] Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1 (2008), 114-24 (p. 116).

peers chanted '*Green-tail, played the truant, Green-tail*'.[146] The educationalist Thomas Pole criticised these techniques, arguing that children who were subjected to such discipline did not amend their conduct because they recognised the error of their ways, but simply because they dreaded physical pain or the ridicule of their classmates.[147] Nevertheless, Wilderspin maintained that extrinsic punishments were the only effective means of curbing truancy.

Infants' behaviour may have shaped the infant schools in other ways. As time progressed, infant schools became more and more structured. Although educationalists did not acknowledge it, drill commands and gallery lessons were somewhat incompatible with a theoretical emphasis on individual engagement and self-discipline. It is probable that educationalists strayed from their own principles and developed these techniques because children exhibited too much rowdiness and too little self-control when teachers afforded them greater freedom. It is argued above that parents' demands may have compelled infant schools to focus increasingly on rote-learning and literacy. However, it is possible that infants' disorderly behaviour may also have played a part. Some teachers may have rejected play and sensory lessons because they found it too difficult to manage children's behaviour during these activities. It was far less taxing for the teacher to keep scholars confined to their seats memorising their books. A teacher who had two hundred scholars under his care reportedly rejected the 'hammering, sawing, jumping, and roaring' of Wilderspin's system and instead 'taught [the children] to sit still and mind their *tasks*, which was more agreeable to that [school] committee than so much "romping and tearing"'.[148] Children's expressions of agency influenced the direction of infant education. Ironically, however, the schools that emerged in the 1830s placed greater constraints on infants' physical and intellectual activity than the first infant schools had done. Expressions of agency contributed, in part, to the eventual limitation of these powers.

Not all infants posed a threat to the Infant System. Some scholars embraced opportunities to exercise their moral agency and authority within the infant schools. There were reports of infants remonstrating with misbehaving pupils and, in some cases, enforcing the moral code of the infant

[146] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 150.
[147] Pole, 50-52.
[148] *The Educational Magazine*, October 1835, p. 294.

schools. Wilderspin told of one boy who confiscated a song sheet from another child, arguing that 'he, as a monitor, had a right to take away from any of his class any thing that was calculated to do them harm'.[149] Children apparently took to their roles with a gusto that suggested they were not just complying with teachers' instructions, but were personally invested in the Infant System. A few scholars may even have been too enthusiastic. One educationalist observed that monitors occasionally conducted themselves 'with a degree of pomposity and importance which it is necessary to check'.[150] The tyrannical monitors seem to have missed the lesson on humbleness. Yet, even if they did not have a perfect command of moral principles, the monitors nonetheless wielded authority and felt empowered.

Teachers claimed that the children loved the schools. One scholar reportedly waded knee-deep through flooded streets to reach his Walthamstow school.[151] Wilderspin claimed that scholars set off for school, sometimes without their mothers' knowledge, before they were properly dressed or had eaten breakfast, so eager were they to attend.[152] Infants often continued to play in the playground well into the evening, long after lessons had concluded for the day.[153] Wilderspin considered that this behaviour demonstrated children's affection for the school, although it is possible that the children simply preferred the school to home. Wilderspin related that the pupils of Quaker Street School had such affection for his wife (who taught alongside him) that they begged to see her when she fell ill and sang hymns at her grave when she died.[154] Teaching manuals are full of sentimental tales of infants who, on their deathbeds, summoned their beloved teachers and thanked them for their instruction.[155] If the tales are to be believed, these were not ritual displays of gratitude, like the thanksgiving ceremonies of the lying-in charities, but voluntary expressions of appreciation. As Helen Rogers suggests, historians should not dismiss charity beneficiaries' expressions of thanks as merely 'ritualistic, obligatory, and deferential performance[s] of the "gift exchange"'. In some cases,

[149] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 271.
[150] Thomas Dick, p. 110.
[151] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 65.
[152] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 51; *Third Report of the Committee*, p. 6.
[153] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 112.
[154] Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 22-25.
[155] Rodgers, pp. 104-05; Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, pp. 173-74.

beneficiaries exercised their agency by 'demonstrat[ing] their own kindliness and capacity to care for others'.[156]

Of course, historians must treat claims of infants' eagerness and love for infant education with some scepticism. Educationalists used such claims to promote their schools and prove the efficacy of their methods. They may have exaggerated, embellished, or invented claims, although lying may have been a step too far for men who prided themselves on leading through example. The model behaviour that educationalists described may not have been typical, but exemplary. It is not possible to confirm the truthfulness of educationalists' claims by comparing them with evidence from other sources, for educationalists' texts are virtually the only sources that discuss children's responses to infant education. Yet, even if educationalists' tales are more fiction than fact, they nevertheless reveal much about how educationalists conceived of infant scholars' agency.

Infant schoolteachers not only encouraged children to monitor the behaviour of their peers, but also that of adults. Teachers did not insist that scholars accept adult dictates without question. Wilderspin believed that teachers ought to conduct themselves just as they expected their scholars to behave and that it was only right for scholars to hold them to account if they did not. Wilderspin related how he had once confiscated a whistle from a boy. He intended to return it at the end of the school day, but forgot to do so. Some weeks later, while lecturing the children on stealing, the boy accused Wilderspin of theft.[157] On another occasion, Wilderspin promised to fold a boat out of paper for his pupils, but found he lacked the skills to do so. One of the boys censured him, telling him he 'should not have promised'.[158] Wilderspin was not angry with his scholars for challenging him and acknowledged his fault in both instances.

The Infant System trained children to be vocal, constantly observing and questioning. Teachers hoped that children would carry their outspoken moral authority from the classroom back to their homes. Infant scholars had a reputation for 'prattling' non-stop at home.[159] Teachers encouraged

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[156] Helen Rogers, 'Kindness and Reciprocity: Liberated Prisoners and Christian Charity in Early Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of Social History*, 47 (2014), 721-45 (p. 737).
[157] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 172.
[158] Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 172.
[159] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 35; Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 177; *Conversation between a Lady*, p. 11.

children to share the songs and lessons they had learned at school with their families. 'Good Resolutions', an infant school poem, painted a rosy picture of parent-child interaction:

> When my father comes home in the evening from work,
> Then I will get up on his knee,
> And tell him how many nice lessons I learn,
> And show him how good I can be.
> […]
> I'll say to him all the nice verses I know,
> And tell him how kind we must be,
> That we never must hurt poor dumb creatures at all,
> And he'll kiss me and listen to me.[160]

Educationalists claimed that infant scholars could be agents of change in their families, transforming the morals of their parents and siblings. The idea that children could be missionaries within their own homes was not new. Sunday school philanthropists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries believed that their scholars had a salutary effect on their relatives, and there was an older tradition of pious children rebuking their relatives while on their sickbeds.[161]

Educationalists related many anecdotes of infant scholars who reformed their parents. Wilderspin claimed that children refused to obey orders to remain at home from school unless their mothers first obtained his permission, thus 'parents [were] brought into some degree of order through the instrumentality of their children'.[162] One little boy awakened his blaspheming mother to her sinfulness by repeating a lesson on the evils of swearing.[163] Many reports claimed that entire families abandoned their immoral habits and began to attend church regularly as a result of infant evangelising.[164] Indeed, reflecting educationalists' belief that immorality fostered indigence, tales of infant missionaries often suggest that improvement to parents' morality increased families' financial

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[160] J.R. Brown, p. 52.
[161] A useful comparison for the infant missionaries may be the children in early modern England who, while ill, reportedly admonished their parents and attendants. Hannah Newton argues that children exercised considerable power in this way. Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 182-83. Malcolm McKinnon Dick, 'English Conservatives and Schools for the Poor c. 1780-1833: A Study of the Sunday School, School of Industry and the Philanthropic Society's School for Vagrant and Criminal Children' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1979), pp. 174, 182; John Allen, *The Daily Companion; Comprising a Portion of Scripture, an Anecdote, and a Verse of a Hymn, for Every Day in the Year* (London: Westley and Davis, 1837), pp. 94-95, 100, 111, 168.
[162] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 150.
[163] *The Children's Friend*, June 1835, p. 139.
[164] Rodgers, pp. 107-08, 110-11; Higgins, p. 18; *The Christian's Penny Magazine*, 28 October 1832, p. 162.

security and domestic comfort.[165] For example, reformed fathers bought food and clothing for their children with the wages that they had previously squandered on drink.

Fig. 5 An illustration of a child reproving her father for swearing, from *The Child's Companion; or, Infant Scholar's Reward* (January 1827)

Wilderspin told a story about an infant scholar who reformed his drunkard father. One night, the father returned home, drunk as usual. The boy's mother remonstrated with her husband and he struck her. The boy intervened, begging: 'Pray, fader, don't beat poor mudder'.[166] The man ordered his son to bed, but the boy knelt by the bed and prayed: 'Pray God bess dear fader and mudder and make fader a good fader'. Wilderspin described the impact of the child's actions on his father:

[165] Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 36-37.
[166] Ibid., p. 35.

> his violence instantly ceased; —for very shame he covered his face with the bed-clothes; —nor could he efface the impression from his mind. In the morning it remained; —it was deepened by subsequent reflection, and he became from that time an altered and religious man[167]

For Wilderspin, the story of the little boy was a useful promotional tool. He recounted the tale at least twice: once in a teaching manual and again before a parliamentary enquiry in an attempt to convince the committee of the far-reaching effects of the Infant System.[168] Wilderspin claimed that the father had informed him of his conversion. Like the vast majority of infant missionary tales, the story was not recorded by plebeian parents, but reported second-hand by an educationalist. The tale may reflect Wilderspin's editing influence, for its storyline fits suspiciously neatly into the arc of the evangelical conversion narrative —from sinfulness, to spiritual awakening, repentance, and the adoption of a godly life. Nevertheless, many educationalists and philanthropists seemed to believe that infant missionaries were not confined to the realm of fiction, but could exist in reality. Teachers actively encouraged their pupils to recite their lessons at home or read moral tracts with their parents. Thomas Cranfield, a teacher at Sunday and infant schools in London, 'seldom finished his addresses [to the children] without repeating some short sentiment or striking anecdote, which the scholars were requested to carry home'.[169] Tales of infant missionaries featured prominently in publications like *The Child's Companion; or, Sunday Scholar's Reward*, which were distributed to schoolchildren (see Fig. 5).[170] To the authors of these publications, the infant missionary was not just propaganda to impress potential subscribers, but a model for plebeian children to emulate.

Although Wilderspin's tale may not accurately reflect a real circumstance, it nonetheless illustrates how educationalists perceived of infants' power to act in the world. In telling the tale,

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[167] Ibid.
[168] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 19.
[169] *Useful Christian*, p. 261.
[170] Sunday school scholars feature more prominently in tales of child evangelising that infant scholars, perhaps a reflection of the numerical superiority of Sunday schools. The character and structure of the tales is much the same regardless of which school the characters attend. Most tales of infant missionaries were presented as factual narratives. See for example *The Child's Companion, or Sunday Scholar's Reward*, February 1824, pp. 55-56; *The Child's Companion, or Sunday Scholar's Reward*, November 1831, pp. 343-44; *The Children's Friend*, April 1828, p. 74; *The Poor Child's Friend: Consisting of Narratives Founded on Fact, and Religious and Moral Subjects* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1825), pp. 32-101; Bourne Hall Draper, *Memoir of Jane Judson, a Sunday Scholar. A True History* (London: Houlston and Son, 1831); Legh Richmond, *The Young Cottager: A True Story*, 26th edn (London: S. Gosnell, 1817).

Wilderspin consciously replicated the boy's simple words and poor pronunciation.[171] He was conscious to do so, for he believed that the infant's manner of speaking was powerful. Referring to Psalm 8:2, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise', educationalists argued that young children expressed their devotion with a sweetness, humbleness, and earnestness that was inherently compelling.[172] Indeed, educationalists suggested that a child's prattle could be more potent than an adult's rebuke. The mother in Wilderspin's tale only aggravated her husband with her criticism, but the boy's 'simple, yet […] striking petition' sparked an emotional response from his father.[173] Educationalists claimed that parents responded to infants' evangelising with wonder, amazement, and shame. Many parents reportedly wept or hid their faces, ashamed that such young children were more pious than they.[174] Evangelical educationalists believed that such emotional outbursts could be catalysts for conversion.

There is evidence, however, that some parents reacted to infant evangelising with anger rather than shame. Educationalists reported that many parents responded to infants' evangelising with verbal or physical reprimands.[175] Although educationalists claimed that these parents eventually realised the merit in their children's actions, it is likely that many plebeian parents never came to tolerate such behaviour from their infants. Far from viewing their children's prattle as 'artless', some parents may have feared that the schools used their children to promote their own religious agendas. Evidence suggests that plebeian parents questioned the motives of infant school philanthropists. Parental suspicion was only heightened by the fact that district visitors of different denominations promoted the schools on their door-to-dour rounds. One visitor remarked that parents 'imagined that some party-purpose had been gained by [visitors who] recruit[ed] so zealously for them'.[176] Irish Catholics reportedly refused to send their children to some infant schools.[177] Many schools sought to allay

[171] Wilderspin emphasised childish language in another tale of an infant missionary. He claimed that the child observed to her father: 'Dere's a criptur tex in our cool [There's a scripture text in our school], and it says that he that peaketh lies shall perish'. Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 35.
[172] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 222-23; Goyder, *Manual: Detailing*, p. 12.
[173] Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, p. 35.
[174] Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 35-36; *The Children's Friend*, June 1835, p. 139.
[175] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 124; Wilderspin, *Early Discipline*, pp. 36-37.
[176] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 54.
[177] Ibid., p. 25.

parents' religious objections by following a non-denominational curriculum that taught the foundational principles of Christianity, but did not raise controversial points of dogma.

Plebeian parents may also have considered infant evangelising an inversion of the natural order. Not only did infant missionaries reprimand their elders; they often disobeyed their parents. One boy repeatedly asked his father to read the Bible to him, ignoring his father's demands for him to desist.[178] Another tale told of a little girl who refused to obey her father's instruction that she buy him pipes on a Sunday.[179] Some parents seem to have feared that children who spent the day at school, rather than at home with their mothers, would grow not to respect them. Parents may have believed that their agency —their authority and control over their own children— would be threatened if their infants became agents of the infant schools. Educationalists attempted to use moral literature to convince parents that such fears were unfounded, yet they nonetheless encouraged children to challenge parents who behaved immorally.[180] They believed that it was justifiable and praiseworthy for infants to disregard parental authority if, by so doing, they upheld God's authority.

Subconsciously, perhaps, most historians tend to view agency as the preserve of adults. Adults are more likely than children to have the physical strength to manipulate their surroundings, a degree of autonomy to make their own decisions, and the mental sophistication to think strategically. Agency is often equated with voice, the articulation of ideas and demands. Historians frequently portray plebeians who had agency as streetwise strategists, tutored in the arts of deception and negotiation. Naïve youngsters do not seem to fit the mould. However, the example of the infant missionaries suggests that, in educationalists' eyes if not necessarily in reality, there could be agency in inarticulacy and inexperience. Moreover, while most historians equate agency with autonomy, the infant missionaries reveal that there might be agency in the instrumental (and early nineteenth-century) sense of acting as an agent for educationalists and for God.

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[178] Wilderspin, *On the Importance*, p. 124.
[179] *The Children's Friend*, June 1835, p. 139.
[180] *The Cottager's Monthly Visitor*, August 1839, p. 353; Wilderspin, *Infant Education*, p. 176.

Conclusions

Infant schools attempted to impose order and regularity on the lives of the poorest Londoners. Educationalists wanted to remove infants from the streets and replace their rough working-class entertainments with morally improving amusements. They also sought to discipline plebeian parents, teaching them how best to raise their offspring and how to behave themselves. This chapter reveals that responses to the Infant System were mixed. Many poor parents found the schools incompatible with their economy of makeshifts. They exercised their agency by demanding teachers amend their practices, by using the institutions against the grain, or else by taking advantage of the choice available to them in the metropolis and sending their children elsewhere. Far from going extinct, the dame schools that A.F.B. Roberts calls 'truly popular institutions' retained their popularity.[181] In 1835 Wilderspin informed a parliamentary committee that there were 'about 20 000 infants' in London's two hundred infant schools. Nevertheless, he bemoaned that this number comprised 'not a third' of all infants in the city and Wilderspin may have overestimated the number of infant scholars.[182] Indeed, dame schools did not go into decline until compulsory education was introduced in the late nineteenth century.[183]

The infant schools that had been designed for the poorest of children were increasingly attended by children of a higher order, whose parents could afford such 'whimsical' schooling and who may have valued the schools as a signifier of their upward mobility. While some schools were colonised by the artisanal class, others became 'little better than Dame Schools'; they offered a sedentary education that emphasised literacy over moral instruction.[184] While many factors combined to alter the nature of infant education, parental pressure may have been one. Some infant schools gave in to sustained demands from plebeian parents for a practical and efficient education for their children.

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[181] A.F.B. Roberts, 'A New View of the Infant School Movement', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 20 (1972), 154-64 (p. 162).
[182] The parliamentary committee estimated that there were fewer infant scholars in London than Wilderspin claimed. HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, pp. 26, 31.
[183] D.P. Leinster-Mackay, 'Dame Schools: A Need for Review', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 24 (1976), 33-48 (pp. 46-47).
[184] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 13.

As Tim Hitchock and Robert Shoemaker argue, small expressions of agency could have far-reaching impact.[185]

Previous chapters focus almost exclusively on the agency of adults. This chapter, however, suggests that children also exercised agency. Although not so strategic or vocal as their parents, they nonetheless acted to satisfy their own desires, pursuing childhood games of which adults disapproved. Children, too, shaped the infant schools. Their acts of disobedience compelled teachers to adapt their methods, occasionally straying from their ideological principles in the process. However, children's agency was not necessarily expressed through rebellion. Educationalists gave infants considerable room to express their power. Some children grasped these opportunities to express their ideas and police the conduct of their playfellows and teachers. Teachers claimed that children showed enthusiasm and love for the infant schools which, if true, suggests that they were personally invested in the Infant System. Educationalists reported that, as missionaries to their parents, infant scholars had a strong influence over their entire households. While infant missionaries may not have existed in reality, they were a powerful representation of agency. This representation suggests that articulacy and strategy are not essential components of agency, for the artless prattle of an infant could reduce hardened adults to tears and transform their conduct.

[185] Hitchcock and Shoemaker.

5. District Visiting Societies

> They are visited periodically by a member of the '*District Visiting Society*'. It is the object of this society to inquire into the condition of the poor, to give them religious advice, and occasional temporal relief, and *to put them in the way of obtaining the assistance of other charitable institutions*.
>
> He may apply […] to the charitable associations of the different religious denominations — to the '*District Visiting Society*', to the Independents' '*Visiting Society*', to the '*Friend in Need Society*', to the '*Stranger's Friend Society*', to '*Zion's Good Will Society*'. He may even be lucky enough to get something from all of them.[1]

In Stone's tale, do-gooders traverse the back alleys and crowded courts of Spitalfields to spread the gospel to the poor. The weaving family are not interested in evangelising. Yet, the family nevertheless welcome any visitor, so long as he or she offers material relief. Reverend Stone was no stranger to visiting societies. He regularly encountered visitors while performing his pastoral duties as Rector of Christ Church, Spitalfields, and he was chairman of the Wheler Chapel District Visiting Society in 1829.[2] However, if Stone had once been a supporter of visiting societies, this was no longer the case when he gave evidence in 1833. Stone was particularly scathing of the visiting societies. He claimed the poor cared little for visitors' religious instruction: '"We want bread and not preaching" is the sentiment uppermost in their minds'.[3] He alleged that the poor conned visitors into distributing excessive amounts of relief. The visitors in the tale not only give material goods to the poor; they also secure further assistance from the parish and other charities. Visiting societies are the connective tissue that makes a life of charity possible for the Spitalfields family. Reverend Stone argued that visitors' naivety and sentimentality made them soft targets for exploitation.

District visiting societies aimed to improve the economic circumstances of the poor but, much more importantly, to raise moral and religious standards. By the time district visiting societies appeared in London in the early 1820s, the capital was already home to dozens of charities with

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[1] William Stone, *Evidence of the Rev. William Stone, Rector of Spitalfields, and Other Witnesses, as to the Operation of Voluntary Charities* ([London?]: [n. pub.], 1833; repr. 1837), pp. 14, 19.
[2] *Brief View of the Wheler-Chapel District Visiting Society* (London: Ellerton, 1829).
[3] Stone, p. 47.

similar goals, the infant schools of the previous chapter among them. However, the founders of district visiting societies insisted that a more 'aggressive' and systematic approach was required to combat irreligion. A writer in the *Christian Review and Clerical Magazine* argued that schools alone could not effect a revolution in the religiosity of the poor, for the schools' teachings did not penetrate far into the home, the breeding ground of immorality. The writer was sceptical of infant missionaries, claiming that:

> For a single instance, in which the child imparts to his parents his own amelioration by school discipline and teaching, there might be found […] a dozen instances, in which, by communication with his wicked relatives, he loses his own virtuous impressions of a morning's growth [at school], and contracts the bad habits he is forced to witness.[4]

District visitors hoped to make the poor more proactive, to dispel what they perceived as religious apathy and propel the poor to read their Bibles and attend church. Visitors also promoted economic independence by encouraging plebeians to seek employment and practice domestic economy. District visiting societies believed that working-class people had become alienated from the middle and upper classes. Visitors aimed to heal the divide. The friendly condescension of wealthy visitors would raise the poor up to middle-class standards of behaviour.

Historians have borrowed anthropologist James C. Scott's concept of public and hidden transcripts to discuss the agency of historical actors.[5] A public transcript is the outward behaviour a subaltern assumes toward a person in a position of authority; it is often a show of subservience and docility. By contrast, a hidden transcript is a rebellious critique of power that is generally hidden from authorities' view, although it might manifest itself subtly in foot-dragging or grumbling. Charities did not 'oppress' the poor in quite the same way as the economic and social structures Scott examines oppressed peasants. The poor in early nineteenth-century London did not risk harsh reprisals if they openly opposed charity officials, although relief might be withheld from them if they did so. The concept of transcripts is relevant to charities because the poor often represented themselves publicly in a certain light in order to obtain their preferred relief or to pursue their own priorities. Single

[4] *The Christian Review and Clerical Magazine*, January 1828, p. 22.
[5] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

mothers claimed to be respectable wives to obtain relief from lying-in hospitals for married women. Some lying-in patients followed medical orders when the accoucheur was present, but ignored them when he left the room. Infant scholars gave plausible excuses for their absence to their teachers, concealing their truant behaviour.

The district visiting societies provide the ideal opportunity to examine transcripts and agency. Although the governors of district visiting societies did not refer to public and private transcripts, they were very aware that the poor could be deceptive. They suspected that the poor behaved very differently in front of philanthropists than when they were in their own company at home. District visitors hoped that, by entering the private space of the domestic environment, they would gain unmediated insight into the *real* physical and spiritual condition of the poor and so prevent deception. As Mary Poovey argues, 'surveillance and ocular penetration of poor neighbourhoods were generally considered to be […] critical to the inculcation of virtue'.[6] District visiting was designed to afford a comprehensive view of the poor. The city was to be divided into districts and the districts into sections, with each section regularly canvassed by its own dedicated visitor. This system would ensure that even the most elusive pauper came under a visitor's discerning eye. The concept of transcripts also suggests a method of approaching source material. Almost all the surviving evidence on early district visiting societies takes the form of published charity reports, in which district visitors described their interactions with poor people. Charity reports are public transcripts of public transcripts. District visitors observed how the poor behaved in their presence and represented this in their own reports to subscribers. In their turn, historians wade through layers of representation, shaping them into their own public scripts, or histories.

The first section of this chapter outlines the development of district visiting societies and introduces the charities' methods for stimulating economic independence and religious activity among the poor. The second section, on the agency of obstruction, reveals that there was often very little correspondence between the district visiting system in theory and in practice. Visitors' hopes of penetrating into the homes and hearts of the poor were frequently disappointed, for many poor people

[6] Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 35.

exercised their agency by erecting physical or behavioural barriers that denied visitors access. They defended their privacy and their independence, refusing to relinquish domestic practices, attitudes, and religious views of which district visitors disapproved. Notions of seeing have long been bound up with conceptions of agency. Foucault argued that the 'disciplinary gaze' of the prison deprived inmates of the power to act and think for themselves.[7] Within their own homes, however, the poor had the ability to evade surveillance. Faced with obstruction, the district visiting societies experimented with alternative, more public, methods of reaching ungodly Londoners. Yet, these new methods also met with a significant amount of resistance, particularly from radical deists who attempted to divert the societies' audiences towards their own cause.

Visitors and the poor alike engaged in surveillance. As visitors attempted to establish oversight over the poor, they themselves were being monitored by the poor —their movements tracked, their religious beliefs carefully noted, and their characters assessed. As Reverend Stone alleged, the poor were '*on the watch* for the visits of the charitable'.[8] The third section of this chapter, on the agency of deception, examines the working-class people who assumed a façade (a public transcript) of religiosity to extract material relief from visitors. The poor used the information they gleaned from their observations to represent themselves in a manner that they believed would impress visitors. Plebeians also identified weaknesses in the implementation of the district visiting system that enabled them to mislead visitors. Because visitors' perspective was shaped by their middle-class expectations and experiences, they were susceptible to errors in judgment when confronted with unfamiliar working-class circumstances.

However, not all poor individuals exercised their agency by rejecting or manipulating the gaze of district visitors. The fourth section of the chapter illustrates the agency of conversion. There are many reports of plebeians embracing the teachings of the visitors, thereby securing standing within their communities and an outlet for their initiative. District visitors claimed that a few people went so far as to cast off their status as objects of charity and became missionary agents in their own

[7] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Allen Lane, 1977).
[8] The emphasis is in the original text. Stone, p. 47.

right. Although reports of such behaviour are highly mediated scripts that ventriloquise plebeian voices, some poor people may nonetheless have found agency in conformity, in acting as agents of district visiting societies and of God. Historians should not assume that every plebeian action concealed a hidden transcript of resistance, but must consider the possibility that the outward conduct and inner state of the poor were in alignment.

Historical Context

District visiting societies did not invent the technique of visiting the poor in their own homes. Long before the nineteenth century, clergymen had called on their parishioners to offer religious guidance and comfort. John Wesley took to visiting people who were in 'a state of affliction, whether of mind or of body' in the 1740s and he encouraged his followers to do the same.[9] During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, middle- and upper-class people visited their poor neighbours, bringing baskets of food and medicine for the ailing. Hannah More's novel *Cælebs in Search of a Wife* featured the virtuous Lucilla, whose devotion to visiting wins her a good husband.[10] *Cælebs* popularised charitable visiting among ladies. Forms of visiting could also be found in organised charities. Some charities sent governors (or staff) to visit prospective beneficiaries at their homes. This was a fraud-detection strategy to establish whether applicants had accurately represented their circumstances to the charity and truly needed and deserved relief. Some institutions had 'visitors' who made periodic visits within institutional walls to monitor day-to-day management and to promote the spiritual welfare of inmates. The Unitarian philanthropist Catherine Cappe encouraged ladies to visit the female wards of hospitals and lunatic asylums to counter the 'moral depravity' of staff and inmates.[11] In the late 1810s, the likes of Elizabeth Fry and Sarah Martin began to visit gaols, seeking to instruct and reform prisoners.

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[9] John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, 3rd edn, 14 vols (London: John Mason, 1829), VII, p. 118.
[10] [Hannah More], *Cælebs in Search of a Wife. Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals*, 2 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1808); Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 277.
[11] Catharine Cappe, *On the Desireableness and Utility of Ladies Visiting the Female Wards of Hospitals and Lunatic Asylums* (York: Thomas Wilson and Sons, 1817), p. 6.

There was a feeling among philanthropists in the early nineteenth century that informal domestic visitation was adequate in the countryside where neighbours knew one another. However, the city —a much more impenetrable landscape— required a more organised approach. Urban charities transformed visiting into a collective endeavour, complete with regulations and boards of governors. The first organisations to take visiting as their *modus operandi*, and not simply as a device for detecting fraud or managing institutions, were the benevolent visiting societies founded in the late eighteenth century. These included the United Society for Visiting and Relieving the Sick (est. 1777), the Friendly Society or Charitable Society for the Relief of the Sick Poor at Their Own Habitations (1781), and the Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society, established by Methodists in 1785 'for the purpose of visiting and relieving sick and distressed strangers and other poor, at their respective habitations'.[12]

As their names and stated aims suggest, benevolent visiting societies were primarily concerned with alleviating distress. The founders of the charities argued that, if philanthropists expected the poor to come to them with requests for relief, they would likely attract only people whose indigence was due to idleness and immorality and who were shameless about demanding handouts. Unlike undeserving paupers, the 'decent and deserving poor [were] unobtrusive'.[13] Illness and debility —which philanthropists considered 'worthy' causes of poverty— made it difficult for the deserving poor to go in search of help. Benevolent visiting societies believed that shame was also an impediment to securing relief, for the deserving poor so valued their self-sufficiency and respectability that they were loath to ask for assistance. Some would sooner starve than beg. As the deserving poor could not or would not make themselves known to philanthropists, they had 'to be sought out and followed in their retired distress'.[14] Benevolent visitors aimed to make visible those people who suffered in obscurity.

Benevolent visitors were very different from charity governors who sat in oak-panelled committee rooms and who summoned the poor to stand before them, maintaining their social and

[12] *Report of the Committee of the Benevolent, or Strangers' Friend Society; Instituted for the Purpose of Visiting and Relieving Sick and Distressed Strangers* (London: J. Butterworth and Son, 1816), p. 1.
[13] Ibid., p. 6.
[14] Ibid.

spatial distance from their beneficiaries. Benevolent visitors aspired to have intimate interactions with the poor, to offer encouragement and solace on a personal level. As Daniel Siegel argues, condescension was central to visiting. 'Abdicat[ing] their distinction' from the poor, 'visitors were required to act like the people they were trying to help'.[15] Visitors stooped low to enter the homes of the poor, but they did not leave their beliefs behind when they did so. Visitors were convinced that their religious and moral outlook was superior to many working-class ways. The visiting relationship was not a partnership of equals, in which both participants learned equally from each other. The visitors believed that their role was to give advice and poor people's role was to take it.

Many benevolent visiting societies had 'friendly' or 'friend' in their titles. These words reflect the condescending approach that visitors strove to adopt, but they also suggest an affinity between benevolent visiting societies and friendly societies. Friendly societies, originating in the mid-seventeenth century, were mutual benefit schemes. By making regular contributions towards a collective fund, labouring people could obtain assistance in the event of illness or distress. While some friendly societies were working-class initiatives, philanthropists established others for the benefit of the poor.[16] Benevolent visiting societies did not require the poor to subscribe for relief. However, benevolent visiting societies shared the friendly societies' concern for self-help and domestic economy. Benevolent visitors aimed to keep the self-sufficient attitude of the deserving poor intact. Visiting was a discreet form of charity. Although visitors sought out 'retired distress', they did not insist that the poor describe their plight before a charity committee or line up with their neighbours for handouts, for the visitors feared that poor people easily became immured to seeking relief in public and lost their self-respect. Reticence about seeking relief was to be encouraged. Like the outpatient lying-in charities, benevolent visitors believed that institutionalisation compromised economic independence because it removed the poor from their families (the incentive to work) and from employment opportunities. Wherever possible, visitors kept the poor within their homes and supplied them with the relief and tools that they required to seamlessly resume their respectable lives.

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[15] Daniel Siegel, 'The Failure of Condescension', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 33 (2005), 395-414 (p. 403).
[16] See for example *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor*, 6 vols (London: W. Bulmer, 1797-1814), II (1799), pp. 79-81, 82-91.

Benevolent visitors claimed that poor domestic economy frequently precipitated a decline into indigence. With access to the homes of the poor, visitors were able to observe domestic arrangements and suggest improvements. Visitors showed the poor how to cook meat without wasting precious juices, how to clothe their families without pawning, and how to heat their lodgings economically. Visitors also practiced 'fiscal evangelism', encouraging the poor to save a portion of their income for future needs.[17] Benevolent visiting societies reflected the philanthropic trend for frugal self-help that Donna Andrew argues became popular in the late eighteenth century.[18] Benevolent visitors likely gained inspiration from the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (SBCP), a charity established in 1796 to teach philanthropists how they could help the poor to help themselves.

The anonymous author of *Beneficent Visits in the Metropolis* illustrated how benevolent visitors sought to stimulate the poor into activity. The author told of a visitor who advised a consumptive needlewoman to change her diet and take outdoor exercise:

> Anxious to follow up this advice and knowing the reluctance of a person thus reduced to change accustomed practice, the visitor called frequently and unexpectedly, and after several remonstrances, expostulations, and warnings, she was enabled at length to arouse from the dangerous lethargy, adopt this wise and simple regimen, and is now a healthful woman[19]

The needlewoman cast off her agentless 'state of sinful apathy' and 'dangerous lethargy' and took concerted efforts to promote her health. The visitor might not have had such a transformative effect had he or she (the visitor, like the book's author, is anonymous) not been able to target the undesirable behaviour at its source, in the home. The visitor suspected that the people he visited adopted a mask —we might say a 'public transcript'— of acquiescence when interacting with benefactors, but that they allowed this façade to slip in their own company. By making impromptu incursions into private spaces, visitors hoped to see the poor in their natural state and so accurately gauge what assistance

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[17] Beverly Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c.1600-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 162-63.
[18] Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
[19] *Beneficent Visits in the Metropolis: with Facts, on the Effects of Simple Regimen and Medicine, and Hints, Particularly and Humbly Addressed to Visitors of the Sick in General*, 2nd edn (London: J. Hill, 1817), p. 21.

was required. The nagging of the visitor, however, also shows that visitors could be 'condescending' in today's pejorative meaning of the word.

The benevolent visiting societies were joined in the early 1820s by a new breed of charity, the district visiting societies. The district visiting societies were inspired by the work of Thomas Chalmers, a minister of the Church of Scotland and a Malthusian social reformer. He was concerned by what he perceived as the urban poor's indifference to religion and over-reliance on parish relief. He strove to reduce the poor rates, to establish schools for religious instruction, and to increase the capacity of churches. In 1819, when he was minister in the Glasgow parish of St John, Chalmers devised an experiment. He hoped that it would create a unified Christian community in which the middle and upper classes embraced their social responsibilities and the poor were respectable and self-respecting. Chalmers divided his parish into twenty-five 'proportions' and assigned a deacon and church elder to each of these geographical areas. He tasked his assistants with visiting poor households in their respective proportions regularly, monitoring morals and promoting domestic economy. The deacons investigated people who requested relief and assisted only those they deemed to be deserving.[20] Chalmers proclaimed the experiment a success. Poor relief expenditure in the parish was reduced by eighty percent over three years, from an annual sum of 1400 pounds to 280 pounds.[21] Chalmers interpreted this decline as proof that the community had become largely self-sustaining and socially cohesive.

Chalmers' vision of visiting was not the informal act of a lady bringing a basket to her neighbour, nor the benevolent visitors' pursuit of retired distress. To Chalmers, visiting was as systematic and comprehensive as scientific enquiry. Visiting was the means to make the hidden visible, to understand the mechanics of immorality and dependence. Chalmers believed that it was a system particularly adapted for the urban environment where traditional ties of mutual obligation between rich and poor had eroded and where the poor were as antichristian as the 'children of the

[20] For more information on Chalmers and his experiment, see Steward J. Brown, 'Chalmers, Thomas (1780-1847)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; George K. Behlmer, *Friends of the Family: The English Home and Its Guardians, 1850-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 36-37.
[21] HCPP, Select Committee on State of Poor in Ireland, 1830 (654), VII.451, pp. 294-95.

desert'.[22] In his widely-read publications, Chalmers described his experiment and called on Christians to go 'to and fro amongst the streets, and the lanes' and to 'penetrate the length and breadth' of the city in search of immorality.[23]

Chalmers' ideas resonated among London philanthropists who were anxious about the heathens in their midst. As was the case in Glasgow, organised religion in London could not keep pace with a rapidly expanding population. Like Chalmers, London clergymen were overwhelmed by the size of their parishes and were unable to meet the needs of their numerous parishioners. Churches in the capital lacked capacity. In 1815 the Reverend Richard Yates called attention to these problems in *The Church in Danger*. Yates calculated that, within a circuit of eight miles around the City of London, there were 953,000 people who did not have access to an established church or minister.[24] The danger he alluded to in his title was that London, the 'heart of British Prosperity, Liberty, and Civilization' might become a nest of 'Infidelity, Atheism, and ignorant depravity —Such a Mine of Heathenism'.[25] Approximately thirty-five churches were built in London under parliamentary acts of 1818 and 1819, but this was an inadequate solution to a growing problem.[26]

Philanthropists noted that increasing church capacity alone would not bring the poor to religion. Many plebeian Londoners showed the same lack of enthusiasm for church that Chalmers had identified among Glaswegians. The hierarchical nature of parish churches was off-putting to poor people. Those who could not afford to pay for a seat were relegated to the most inconvenient corners of the church, from which it was difficult to see and hear services.[27] A writer in the *Congregational Magazine* noted that the poor were intimated by the church's 'splendid portico' and 'fashionable throng' and by the beadle at the doors 'placed like Cerberus to frighten poor souls'.[28] Although the

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[22] Thomas Chalmers, *Sermons Preached in St John's Church, Glasgow* (Glasgow: Chalmers and Collins, 1823), p. 386.
[23] Ibid., pp. 385, 386.
[24] Richard Yates, *The Church in Danger: A Statement of the Cause, and of the Probable Means of Averting That Danger Attempted; in a Letter to the Right Honourable Earl of Liverpool* (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1815), p. 75.
[25] Ibid., p. 51.
[26] Andrew Saint, 'Anglican Church-Building in London, 1780-1890: From State Subsidy to Free Market', in *The Victorian Church; Architecture and Society*, ed. by Chris Brooks and Andrew Saint (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 30-50 (pp. 32, 34).
[27] Attempts to intermingle seating for rich and poor met with objections from the rich. HCPP, Select Committee on Observance of Sabbath, 1831-32 (697), VII.253, pp. 18, 246-47.
[28] *The Congregational Magazine*, August 1827, p. 447.

writer displayed a nonconformist's discomfort with formal religion, his claim that the poor felt out of place in church may well have been accurate. Philanthropists frequently reported that labouring people avoided services because they did not want to be seen in ragged clothing.[29] Then there were those working-class people who did not ascribe to Christianity or who felt that the Sabbath was best devoted to work or leisure.

To some commentators, segregated seating in churches was a physical reflection of a growing divide between rich and poor. Philanthropists feared that, in the vast metropolis, the wealthy were losing their influence over the poor and the poor were abandoning moral and religious standards. Reverend Tyler described the inhabitants of his parish of St Giles as 'completely a distinct population […] almost entirely beyond the sphere of the beneficial effects of their superiors', except through district visiting.[30] There was concern among philanthropists that, the rich having abdicated their responsibility over the poor, the poor would turn to alternative sources of leadership in the likes of Thomas Paine. If the situation were not addressed, revolution might lie in England's future. Indeed, the Spa Fields riots of 1816 and the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820 were clear indications of the potential for public unrest.

District visiting societies adopted many of Chalmers' methods. They claimed to be more aggressive than the benevolent visiting societies. While benevolent visitors only visited select 'deserving' households, district visiting societies were more comprehensive. District visiting societies divided their district into sections and assigned one or two visitors to go from house to house in each section. This canvassing brought visitors into contact with a range of working-class people, from the lowliest inhabitants of cheap lodging houses and brothels to tradespeople and shopkeepers verging on the middle class. Visitors were encouraged to become intimately acquainted with residents in their sections, facilitating instruction and the detection of fraud. Unlike benevolent visiting societies, district visiting societies emphasised religion above material relief. The governors of district visiting societies instructed that material aid should only be distributed in exceptional circumstances, and only then in very limited qualities that did not encourage dependence.

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[29] HCPP, Select Committee on Observance of Sabbath, p. 18.
[30] Ibid., p. 265.

Nonconformists of all varieties took up visiting in large numbers. As Anne Summers notes, dissenters may have been open to visiting because 'the distinctions between priest and laity were less pronounced [in nonconformist communities] than they were in Anglicanism, and the sphere of women was less narrowly confined'.[31] Nonconformists believed that ministering to the poor was not the preserve of ordained clergymen; Christian laypeople of both sexes were qualified to spread the Word. Anglicans were less comfortable with lay preaching. However, visiting was compatible with the Evangelical doctrine of sanctification which held that Christians should lead a 'life of social usefulness in imitation of the life of Christ'.[32] Just as Jesus entered the homes of the poor, so too did evangelicals embark on personal missions of mercy.

District visiting societies typically formed around religious communities. Many societies named themselves after the church, chapel, or parish with which they were associated. Clergymen often headed district visiting societies, with visitors drawn from congregations. The minute books of district visiting societies seldom record personal details about visitors, but memoirs and biographies give some insight into volunteers, especially those who were particularly diligent (and thus merited memorialisation). The vast majority of visitors were from the middle class. Caleb Harrison, a minister's son, joined the Congregationalist Craven Chapel when he was eighteen and became an agent for the visiting society attached to the chapel.[33] Many visitors were women, perhaps because they were more likely than men to have time during the day to visit the poor.[34] Some charities encouraged male visitors to visit on Sundays so that they could catch working men at home and female visitors on weekdays, when they were likely to have poor women to themselves.[35] Elizabeth Leifchild, the wife of a Craven Chapel minister, was a visitor, as was the Quaker Hannah Kilham,

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[31] Anne Summers, 'A Home from Home — Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century', in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. by Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 33-63 (pp. 38-39).
[32] Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police*, p. 166.
[33] *Memoir of the Late Rev. Caleb William Harrison, Romsey, Hants* (London: J. Unwin, 1845), pp. 5-6.
[34] Thomas Sims, *Lay-Helpers: or, A Plea for the Co-Operation of the Laity with the Clergy* (London: James Nisbet, 1831), p. 38.
[35] The Christian Instruction Society advised female visitors to work on weekdays because, as working men were then at work, female visitors would 'escape the rude remarks' which men might otherwise direct at them. *The Principles and Plan of the Society for Promoting Christian Instruction, (Established in London, June MDCCCXXV;) with Hints to Assist Its Agents* (London: [n. pub.], 1828), p. 14.

who visited in St Giles when not on mission trips abroad.[36] A small number of visitors came from higher ranks. A judge reportedly visited in St Giles.[37] There were also a few working-class visitors. Thomas Cranfield, who was at different times a tailor and a sailor, eventually discovered his calling as an agent of the Union Street Christian Instruction Society.[38]

The Agency of Obstruction

Charitable institutions and their committee rooms were under the control of philanthropists. The poor were 'guests' in these spaces, their presence within them contingent on the governors' favour. However, this situation was reversed with district visiting. Poor people had the ability to decide if, and under what conditions, visitors were admitted into their homes. District visitors frequently found that the poor maintained physical barriers against them. Domestic spaces enabled avoidance. When one man was approached in his garden by visitors of the Christian Instruction Society, he made a 'speedy retreat', presumably indoors.[39] Many poor people simply refused to admit visitors over the threshold. English law upheld householders' rights to defend their property against interlopers and the poor occasionally used violence against visitors. They verbally abused visitors and slammed doors in their faces. They threatened (or actually did) throw filth, household objects, or buckets of water at visitors.[40] The potential for conflict was such that some societies recommended that visitors, especially women, work in pairs for greater safety.

There was a multitude of reasons why the poor prevented visitors from entering their homes. Some poor people thought little of the religious teachings of the visitors. District visitors reported that they encountered 'infidels' who 'sneered' at the Bible.[41] Immigration to England, particularly from Ireland, rose after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. There were approximately 100,000 Irish

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[36] [John] Leifchild, *The Minister's Help-Meet. A Memoir of the Late Mrs Elizabeth Leifchild, Wife of the Rev. Dr Leifchild* (London: Ward, [1856]), p. 47; Hannah Kilham, *Memoir of the Late Hannah Kilham; Chiefly Compiled from Her Journal*, ed. by Sarah Biller (London: Darton and Harvey, 1837), pp. 292-95.
[37] HCPP, Select Committee on Observance of Sabbath, p. 265.
[38] *The Useful Christian: A Memoir of Thomas Cranfield, for about Fifty Years a Devoted Sunday School Teacher* (London: Religious Tract Society, [1844]), p. 133.
[39] *Christian Instruction Society. Occasional Papers, No. 2* ([London]: [n. pub.], [1832?]), p. 17.
[40] *Christian Instruction Society*, p. 14; *Useful Christian*, pp. 73-74; Leifchild, p. 47; *The Friendly Visitor*, December 1830, p. 135.
[41] Leifchild, pp. 47-48.

immigrants in Britain before 1800 and 400,000 by 1841.[42] Visitors frequently found that Catholics from Ireland or Europe were far from receptive to their visits. While district visitors believed that they visited with friendly condescension, many poor people viewed district visitors as condescending in the pejorative twenty-first century sense of the word. A visitor in St Giles noted that even the poorest Irish were deeply offended when elegantly dressed visitors expressed disgust at their living conditions or sidestepped filth on the streets.[43]

Some poor people considered the visitors to be intrusive and interfering, their questions too probing.[44] One man explained why he avoided his local visiting society: 'I should not like […] to have my name in their books, mixed up with all the drunkards and blackguards of the parish, or to have my case talked about when the gentry meet together to settle their affairs'.[45] This man equated visiting with lack of respectability. He objected to the visitors' inquires, for these made his economic circumstances known among his neighbours. Although this man's opinion was recorded in the early 1840s, it is likely that plebeians in early decades felt similarly. Lynn MacKay argues that working-class people resented charitable investigation because it compromised their reputations within their communities, negatively affecting their ability to access relief and borrowing networks.[46] Disruption to family routines may have been another reason why the poor rejected visitors; one set of instructions hinted at this, for it advised visitors to call only when it was convenient to the poor.[47] Some poor people seemed to have considered visitors' moral advice as unwarranted attacks on their character. When visitors rebuked them for trading on Sunday, a greengrocer and his wife said that 'they were as good as their neighbours, and none of us were perfect'.[48]

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[42] Patty Seleski, 'Identity, Immigration, and the State: Irish Immigrants and English Settlement in London, 1790-1840', in *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, ed. by George K. Behlmer and Fred M. Leventhal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 11-27 (p. 15).
[43] *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, March 1837, p. 228.
[44] *The British Review, and London Critical Journal*, September 1820, p. 102.
[45] The emphasis is in the original text. [William Harness], *Visiting Societies and Lay Readers. A Letter to the Lord Bishop of London* (London: James Darling, 1844), pp. 22-23.
[46] Lynn MacKay, *Respectability and the London Poor, 1780-1870: The Value of Virtue* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 108.
[47] *The District Visitor's Manual: A Compendium of Practical Information and of Facts for the Use of District Visitors*, 2nd edn (London: John W. Parker, 1840), p. 28.
[48] *Christian Instruction Society*, p. 18.

Some visitors reported feeling despondent when doors were shut against them. However, district visiting societies encouraged visitors not to give up, but to proceed with Christ-like tolerance, seeking out the strayed sheep with a 'spirit of Christian perseverance'.[49] Instructions for district visitors suggested that visitors wear down hostility by calling regularly on those who rejected their visits, although such an approach may have simply worsened their reputation for intrusiveness. Visitors also sought to gain entry into homes by appealing to the interests of the residents, perhaps even by concealing their evangelising purposes. District visiting societies advised visitors not to launch directly into religious discussion on the doorstep, but to first establish a rapport with the poor by asking about their employment and children.[50] Although district visiting societies professed to eschew material relief, in practice district visitors secured considerable amounts of assistance for their beneficiaries, much of it in the form of recommendations and tickets to other charitable organisations. Historian Martin Hewitt suggests that visitors compromised their anti-relief stance to gain entry into plebeian homes.[51]

Even if visitors were able to wheedle themselves into homes, they were likely to encounter further difficulties. Having perhaps gained entry by holding out the promise of material relief, visitors frequently found that the poor were willing to speak with them about their material circumstances, but that their interest evaporated when conversation turned to spiritual matters. Visitors might be able to establish a visual presence in the room, but securing an auditory connection was an entirely different matter. The poor frequently hindered visitors' attempts to speak with them. They could be listless conversationalists, barely listening to or answering visitors' questions. One visitor suspected that an old woman feigned deafness in her presence.[52] Capitalising on the fact that they were within their own homes, some people performed noisy chores that drowned out visitors' voices.

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[49] Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry; with an Inquiry into the Causes of Its Inefficiency; with an Especial Reference to the Ministry of the Establishment*, 3rd edn (London: R.B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1830), p. 608.
[50] *The Fourth Annual Report of the General Society for Promoting District Visiting. To Which Is Prefixed, A Sermon, Preached on Behalf of the Institution* (London: A. Macintosh, 1832), p. 44.
[51] Visitors occasionally reported that granting relief dispelled hostility. See for example Kilham, pp. 283-84. Martin Hewitt, 'District Visiting and the Constitution of Domestic Space in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. by Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 121-41 (p. 136).
[52] *District Visitor's Manual*, p. 81.

Occasionally, the poor were more direct and told the visitors to let them be. When a visitor repeatedly warned a dying man about his dangerous spiritual state, the man exclaimed that 'he did not want to be teased and perplexed with any conversation'.[53] Another man in a similar situation 'with oaths and blasphemies, desired he might not be troubled with such nonsense'.[54] Visitors and plebeians seem to have held different views about when and where serious discussion was appropriate. This was nowhere more apparent than at the deathbed. Visitors urged the dying to repent and to seek God. However, some poor people believed that it was improper for the visitors to 'tease' them and insisted that their failing physical and mental faculties ought not to be taxed with conversation. Others did not want to be consumed in anxious introspection during their final days, but to face death bravely with bravado and even jollity. One woman gamely told her visitor that she would go to the theatre as soon as she recovered, 'for were she to become so religious as [her visitor] would have her, she should be quite melancholy'.[55] A dying man declared to his visitor: 'I know I must die […] and intend to meet it like a man!'[56] For these people, there was something pathetic about fixating on death. Death itself could not be avoided, but the dying could nevertheless exert some control over how they reacted to the inevitable. Like the criminals who 'died game' on the scaffold, plebeians sought to show that death did not deprive them of their spirit.

Visitors not only faced resistance from the subjects of their instruction, but also from the friends and religious mentors of poor people. District visitors might find that they were not the sole person in the room who was interested in a soul. A visitor in St Giles recorded a case in which a Catholic priest arrived while a visitor was attending the deathbed of an Irishman. The dying man rebuffed the priest, upon which the priest 'went out in a rage […] menacing the people of the house with the church's vengeance, if they suffered [Protestant visitors] any longer'.[57] For Protestant district visitors, Catholicism was the antithesis of active Christianity. They argued that Catholics had little

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[53] *The Third Annual Report of the Society for Promoting Christian Instruction in London and Its Vicinity* (London: J. Dennett, 1828), p. 17.
[54] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 34.
[55] *The Fifth Annual Report of the Society for Promoting Christian Instruction in London and Its Vicinity* (London: J. Dennett, 1830), p. 6.
[56] *Christian Instruction Society*, p. 16.
[57] *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, March 1837, p. 232.

autonomy to interpret the Bible for themselves. Moreover, they claimed that Catholic priests threatened and frightened the poor into following their instructions. Catholics were thus unable to pursue God in a personal way, as evangelicals wished them to do. The morning after the priest's outburst, the women of the house sent a message to the visitor in which they warned that they would 'break [her] head' if she did not stay away.[58] Although the visitor did visit the house again (without molestation), the Irish women continued to hinder her efforts. The dying man's landlady attempted to remove him to the workhouse, where the visitor would not be able to access him. When the visitor circumvented this plan, the man's friends continued to pressure him to summon the Catholic priest.

Hoping to overcome barriers to visitation, many visitors turned to tracts. Visitors distributed immense quantities of these short publications on moral and religious subjects. They believed that tracts 'avoid[ed] the appearance of impertinent intrusion' and could therefore infiltrate where visitors were unwelcome.[59] Visitors left tracts with people who would not invite them into their homes or listen to them and they may even have slipped tracts under doors that were barred against them.[60] Philanthropists hoped that the tracts would not elicit the same hostile reactions as human visitors often did:

> When we speak to a neighbour, on divine things, he is apt to consider us as assuming the place of a master, and setting up for his superior in knowledge and goodness. Pride instantly takes the alarm. He scorns to be dictated to, as he conceives it. His heart is steeled against counsel, and an answer, expressive of disdain, is all the fruit of our labour. But, when a little Tract is put into his hands, the teacher is not the giver of the book; but a third person, an absent lettered sage. It is read apart from him who gave it. The idea of inferiority, which was so mortifying, is removed. There is not that enmity against the paper and print, which was raised by the presence and living voice of the instructor; hence the reader exercises more candour and patience[61]

The anonymous voice of the tract —the 'absent lettered sage'— was, in theory, easier for the poor to tolerate than the direct confrontation of visitors which, however sensitively approached, might offend pride. The tracts acted as agents for the visitors. Inspired by Actor-Network Theory, some historians argue that objects have agency. While early nineteenth-century philanthropists did not have a notion

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[58] Ibid., p. 233.
[59] *Principles and Plan*, p. 12.
[60] *The British Critic, and Quarterly Theological Review*, October 1840, pp. 354-55.
[61] *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years of the Religious Tract Society; Being a Compendium of Its Reports, and Extracts from the Appendices* (London: Benjamin Bensley, 1820), p. 9.

of actor networks, they did believe that tracts could exert a human-like influence. They claimed that, like a sensitive mediator, tracts softened opposition and opened the way for direct contact between visitors and the poor. Tracts were occasionally referred to as 'visitors of mercy' and 'silent visitors', as if the publications shared human visitors' capacity to instruct and reform.[62] Indeed, tract magazine titles such as *The Weekly Visitor* and *The Friendly Visitor* anthropomorphise the publications.

Philanthropists' optimistic projections about how the poor would respond to tracts were not always correct. District visiting societies frequently reported that the poor refused the tracts. Some evidently found the tracts just as bothersome and intrusive as the visitors themselves. One woman declined a tract on the grounds that she 'did not wish to be interfered with'.[63] There is some suggestion that poor people accepted tracts (perhaps to rid themselves of visitors at their doors), but then did not read them. Francis Place claimed in 1835 that the poor did not like the tracts and that consequently 'an immense number' were 'distributed and wasted'.[64] Rather than consider the tracts as an impartial voice of reason, some poor people seem to have taken the tracts personally. A tract-distributor related how he had given a tract, *What Do You Get by Gin Drinking?*, to a family that coincidentally shared both the surname and the fish-selling occupation of a character in the tract.[65] The tract distributor claimed that the family believed that the tract had been written about them and were incensed, especially since the fish-seller in the tract deals in rotten fish.

Although it was highly unusual for there to be such a correspondence between a tract's characters and its readers, it is nevertheless possible that working-class people were offended by the suggestion that they were like the drunken, gambling, and Sabbath-breaking ne'er-do-wells who feature in the tracts. Indeed, far from having a soothing influence over the poor, the tracts occasionally elicited strong reactions. In 1830 a visiting society in Hoxton stopped supplying tracts to the police offices after the men there took to destroying them.[66] There were some reports that the poor used

[62] *Proceedings of the First Twenty*, p. 291; *The Tract Magazine, and Christian Miscellany*, December 1833, p. 144.
[63] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 36.
[64] HCPP, Select Committee on Education of People of England and Wales, 1835 (465), VII.763, p. 85.
[65] *The Tract Magazine, and Christian Miscellany*, May 1834, p. 100.
[66] LMA, Hoxton Auxiliary Christian Instruction Society minute book, N/C/19/010, 12 July 1830.

tracts to light their pipes, to start fires, or even to serve as toilet paper —reflecting, perhaps, their low estimation of the tracts' contents.[67]

Publications about district visiting are filled with the imagery of light. John Blackburn, a supporter of the Christian Instruction Society wrote that the 'darkest recesses of the Capital must be explored, and our Jerusalem "must be searched as with candles"'.[68] Despite visitors' efforts to access the homes of the poor, some working-class districts remained stubbornly impenetrable. Visitors from one visiting society reported that, with respect to spiritual matters in their section, 'all is Egyptian darkness, even the faintest hopes we began to indulge are almost dead'.[69] On occasion, societies abandoned entire sections when they failed to make an impression.[70]

By the late 1820s many visiting societies that had been established for domestic visitation extended their missionary efforts beyond the home, establishing indoor preaching stations and conducting outdoor sermons. The Christian Instruction Society, an umbrella society dominated by dissenters, was particularly active in these respects.[71] Lay visitors frequently ran small prayer groups. The Christian Instruction Society stated that it allowed pious laymen to preach, but in reality it appears that ministers and theological students did the majority of this work.[72] Among the men the Christian Instruction Society hired for preaching were Reverend John Blackburn, pastor of the Independent Claremont Chapel, and Dr Louis Giustiniani, a priest who had converted from Catholicism to Protestantism. Giustiniani's command of four languages made him an ideal candidate

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[67] *The Tract Magazine, and Christian Miscellany*, April 1833, p. 48; Robert Huish, *Memoirs of the Late William Cobbett, Esq., M.P. for Oldham; Embracing All the Interesting Events of His Memorable Life*, 2 vols (London: John Saunders, 1836), II, p. 357.
[68] John Blackburn, *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Claims of the Metropolis: A Discourse, Delivered at the City Chapel, London, Introductory to the Second Series of Lectures to Mechanics* (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1827), p. 25.
[69] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 37.
[70] *Fifth Annual Report*, p. 7.
[71] Anglican societies did not tend to engage in public preaching for, as Anna Davin explains, 'it was tainted with Methodist revivalism and emotional excess; its practitioners seen as uneducated ranters, eccentric and unorthodox, not only laymen but beyond the steadying influence of the Church'. Anna Davin, 'Socialist Infidels and Messengers of Light: Street Preaching and Debate in Mid-Nineteenth-Century London', in *The Streets of London: From the Great Fire to the Great Stink*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore (London: Rivers Oram, 2003), pp. 165-82 (p. 174).
[72] *The Congregational Magazine*, August 1827, p. 450.

for preaching to foreigners.[73] The Christian Instruction Society anticipated that its informal preaching would attract those who avoided more conventional religious services; the society may also have hoped that preaching might reach people who disliked the probing visits of district visitors.

The Christian Instruction Society regularly reported that its services were well attended by attentive crowds. However, this was not always the case. In 1830 the governors of the Hoxton Auxiliary Christian Instruction Society discontinued a preaching station, referring vaguely to the 'thin attendance […] & other circumstances connected therewith of a discouraging nature'.[74] Disorder was a particular problem at the outdoor sermons. While open-air preaching had the benefit in that it could draw in passersby, its public nature meant that the societies had very little control over who attended. Sources give the impression that the sermons had a loyal following of peaceable attendees, but that there were others who were intent on causing trouble. Outdoor services gained such a reputation for disorderly behaviour that the city authorities occasionally attempted to close them down.[75] While preaching for the Christian Instruction Society in 1827 and 1828, Reverend D. Francis faced:

> Attempts […] to excite riot, the windows have been broken, and missiles have been aimed at his person; on one occasion the Bible was snatched from his hand by a furious enemy, who partially tore it and threw it to the ground[76]

The report does not mention who was behind this disruptive behaviour, but it was likely Robert Taylor and his followers, who were thorns in the side of the Christian Instruction Society.

Taylor was an Anglican clergyman who reinvented himself as a radical deist. In 1824 he established the Christian Evidence Society for 'investigating the evidences of the Christian religion' and published a manifesto in which he outlined his deist views.[77] His activities seemed to mirror those of the similarly named Christian Instruction Society, only with an entirely different message. Taylor preached in public and produced tracts for distribution. Taylor and his associates dogged the public activities of the Christian Instruction Society. They interrupted the society's meetings and sermons,

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[73] *The Pilot, or Sailors' Magazine*, May 1835, pp. 161-62; Lesley J. Borowitzka, 'The Reverend Dr Louis Giustiniani and Anglican Conflict in the Swan River Colony, Western Australia 1836-1838', *Journal of Religious History*, 35 (2011), 352-73 (p. 355).
[74] LMA, Hoxton Auxiliary Christian Instruction Society minute book, N/C/19/010, 12 July 1830.
[75] *Third Annual Report*, pp. 20-21.
[76] Ibid., p. 22.
[77] *Trial of the Reverend Robert Taylor, A.B.M.R.C.S. upon a Charge of Blasphemy, with His Defence, as Delivered by Himself* (London: J. Carlile, 1827), p. 12.

hissing at the speakers and loudly questioning the legitimacy of the Bible.[78] They attempted to address the crowd and submitted amendments to the chairman of charity meetings, in which they requested to discuss their views.[79] The Christian Instruction Society attempted to deprive Taylor of a public platform. To engage with Taylor would be to suggest that his views were equivalent to those held by the Christian Instruction Society and that it was logical to question Biblical teachings.[80] In the heat of a debate, infidels might catch preachers off guard and 'twist their words' and their forceful presence might sway the ignorant crowds.[81] The Christian Instruction Society attempted to prevent radicals from attending their events. If they did manage to get through, the society's agents generally refused to engage with them and attempted to remove them, a task that frequently proved difficult. When Taylor interrupted a meeting in the Barbican Chapel in 1827, the minister ordered him to leave, declaring that the 'place was not a debating club'. After once again trying to address the audience, Taylor left, taking a 'great crowd' with him and the windows of the chapel were smashed.[82]

Although Iain McCalman states that Taylor's supporters were primarily 'middling', the Christian Instruction Society evidently felt that Taylor posed a threat to the people who were under their instruction, especially the 'mechanics' whom Robert Taylor and Richard Carlile addressed in their publications.[83] Indeed, district visitors reported encountering 'infidels' while on their rounds. Elizabeth Leifchild reportedly met a man in a low lodging house who denounced the Bible as a 'tissue of fables', using the same words as those employed by Taylor.[84] There were also reports of district visitors and infidels distributing tracts to the same poor households.[85] The Christian Instruction Society was sufficiently concerned about the influence Taylor wielded that by 1826 it had initiated an annual series of lectures for 'mechanics' in which ministers explained the 'leading truths of the

[78] *The Age*, 11 February 1827; *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, March 1827, p. 107; *The Age*, 8 November, 1829; *New Baptist Miscellany*, December 1829, p. 520; K.P. Russell, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Pyer* (London: John Snow, 1865), p. 161; *The Anti-Infidel*, 28 October 1831, pp. 344.
[79] *The Times*, 4 November 1829; *The Age*, 8 November 1829.
[80] *The Evangelical Magazine*, May 1827, p. 190.
[81] Davin, p. 176.
[82] *The Age*, 11 February 1827.
[83] Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 190.
[84] Leifchild, p. 48; *The Lion*, 22 February 1828, p. 233.
[85] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 54.

Revelation'.[86] However, the lectures did not escape the radicals' attention. Taylor made an appearance on one occasion and, although he alleged that a crowd of Christian Instruction Society supporters attacked him, it is equally likely that his own followers were violent.[87] Radicals distributed their publications among the attendees at the lectures.[88] While the Christian Instruction Society was not willing to debate with Taylor in public, it did take action to mitigate the influence of his texts. In 1826 the charity published a refutation of Taylor's arguments that, in turn, led to a series of further exchanges in print between Taylor and representatives of the Christian Instruction Society.[89] The Christian Instruction Society likely supported efforts to have Taylor arrested and tried for blasphemy, although imprisonment did not seem to dampen Taylor's enthusiasm. The radicals railed against efforts to suppress them, insisting that they were the 'friends of fair and impartial discussion'.[90] Taylor and Carlile aped the efforts of the Christian Instruction Society, holding their own series of lectures, running a Sunday school, and even embarking on an 'infidel missionary tour'.[91]

The founders of district visiting societies projected that their agents would lay bare the hearts and homes of poor Londoners. In many cases, this was not to be. Poor people regularly exercised their agency by rejecting district visitors and their religious and moral counsel. Attempts to overcome barriers to domestic visitation, through tracts or public gatherings, were not entirely effective. District visitors believed that tracts were inoffensive mediators, but many poor people considered the tracts to be just as patronising and intrusive as the district visitors and treated both with contempt. Public sermons and lectures had the potential to reach large audiences, yet the Christian Instruction Society risked losing control to radicals who threatened to steal its public platform and its audience. Indeed,

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[86] *Third Annual Report*, p. 22.
[87] *The Lion*, 9 May 1828, p. 583.
[88] *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, June 1827, p. 259; *The Anti-Infidel*, 11 November 1831, p. 380.
[89] J.P.S. [John Pye Smith], *An Answer to a Printed Paper Entitled,* Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society. *Published by the Society for Promoting Christian Instruction*, 2nd edn (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1827); Robert Taylor, *Syntagma of the Evidences of the Christian Religion. Being a Vindication of the* Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society *against the Assaults of the Christian Instruction Society* (London: William Dugdale, 1828); John Pye Smith, *An Answer to a Printed Paper Entitled,* Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society*; The Third Edition. To Which Is Annexed, a Rejoinder to a Pamphlet by the Same Author, the Rev. Robert Taylor*, 3rd edn (London Holdsworth and Ball, 1829).
[90] *The Age*, 8 November 1829. See also *The Lion*, 28 March 1828, p. 389; *The Lion*, 8 May 1829, p. 590.
[91] *The Lion*, 28 March 1828, pp. 385-86; *The Lion*, 13 February 1829, p. 334.

there is a suggestion that some among the poor were much more receptive to infidel arguments than to district visitors' evangelising.

The Agency of Deception

District visiting societies encountered great difficulty with poor Londoners who obstructed or actively resisted their efforts. However, some reports suggested that the charities faced a much more surreptitious challenge. These reports claimed that working-class people assumed an outward façade of distress or religiosity to extract material relief from visitors, but remained inwardly unaffected by visitors' teachings. It is difficult to establish how widespread deception was. By nature, deception is elusive. Much of the evidence of deceptive behaviour comes from the testimony of commentators like Reverend Stone who were on a mission to prove that district visiting was a flawed project that encouraged immorality. In their published reports, the district visiting societies frequently acknowledged the open hostility they faced, for this allowed them to showcase visitors' Christian perseverance and to demonstrate the scale of plebeian dissipation (therefore justifying another call for subscriptions). By contrast, charity reports rarely stated explicitly that the poor deceived visitors. There are several possible reasons for this: deception may not have been a common occurrence, the visitors who compiled the reports may have been unaware that they had been duped, or —perhaps most likely— the charities did not wish to acknowledge the failure of their fraud-detection strategies. However, reading between the lines of charity reports reveals anxiety about the potential for deception. Regardless of the true extent of deception, there was a perception that the poor exercised a manipulative agency.

Reverend Stone insisted that most plebeians were not interested in religious instruction, but were interested solely in material goods. He alleged that the poor manipulated the district visitors into distributing far more relief than was advisable, with a resulting increase in dependency and idleness.[92] Stone and fellow commentators argued that the poor did so by assuming a false front —a 'public transcript'— of extreme poverty in visitors' presence. Stone believed that the poor concocted

[92] Stone, pp. 14, 19.

'dramas' of distress to convince visitors to grant them assistance.[93] Guides for district visitors warned that the poor frequently feigned illness or borrowed children from neighbours to make their situation appear all the more desperate.[94]

More alarming than the exaggeration or invention of distress were hypocritical professions of piety. While district visitors observed the poor, they were also themselves under surveillance. If agency is having control of the 'gaze', then this was an agency that both visitors and visited wielded. Some commentators claimed that poor people carefully noted the behaviour and language of visitors and copied this to suit their own purposes. A writer in *The Educational Magazine* observed that a visitor:

> often finds the ready assent given to the 'revelation of the mystery', when the mystery is not revealed; and it is not at all an unfrequent case for the object to acquire a set of phrases expressive of his feelings, the awfulness of his state, and of the mercy to be obtained by a Redeemer through the sacrifice of his death, when the nature of that sacrifice and the conditions of salvation […] are perfectly unknown[95]

The reports of district visiting societies occasionally record the verbal and written statements of people who had been visited. The language of these statements is often indistinguishable from that used by visitors. The Christian Instruction Society reported that the Lee family wrote to their visitor: 'you came like a messenger from Heaven. You aroused us from our gloom, and requested us strictly to attend to devotion, and fervently to pray to God to forgive our sins'.[96] It is possible that visitors manufactured the letter to promote their efforts. Alternatively, the Lee family may have penned it. If that was the case, their words may have been heartfelt or they may have been insincere formulae — borrowed, perhaps, from a moral tract— trotted out to secure assistance from visitors. Instructions to visitors recommended that they regard pious language with some suspicion, hinting that shamming was a problem.[97]

It is possible that the poor not only adopted the linguistic conventions of religiosity, but its emotional markers too. Evangelical visitors believed that conversion was often accompanied by

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[93] Ibid., p. 47.
[94] *District Visitor's Manual*, pp. 150, 267; *The Educational Magazine*, May 1835, p. 292.
[95] *The Educational Magazine*, January 1835, pp. 293-94.
[96] *Third Annual Report*, p. 16.
[97] *District Visitor's Manual*, p. 267.

profuse displays of emotion. District visitors reported that poor people burst into floods of tears or cried out in joy.[98] These may have been spontaneous expressions of true emotion or, perhaps just as likely, a performance to convince the visitors that their spiritual state had changed. District visitors seldom proclaimed with certainty that they had converted the poor in their sections. As Martin Hewitt notes, there is usually a 'fragility [in] the confidence expressed'.[99] The poor 'seemed' pleased when visitors called or visitors were 'induced to hope' that they had made an impression.[100] The note of uncertainty in these reports may suggest that visitors felt unable to make definitive judgments about the spiritual state of those they visited, for only God could see into men's souls. However, it may also reflect visitors' suspicions that outward appearances did not reflect inner states and that the poor merely acted out what visitors wished to see. Certainly, district visitors may have found that the 'piety' of the poor was fleeting, lasting only so long as their season of need.

The district visiting system had been designed specifically to prevent fraud. And yet, district visiting in practice often fell far short of the ideal. The division of the city into districts and sections was designed to ensure that visitors' attention was spread evenly across the metropolis. In theory, visitors would have such extensive knowledge of the households in their sections that the poor would have difficulty deceiving them. By the mid-1820s there were dozens of visiting societies in London. There was often little consultation, much less cooperation, between them. Religious competition was largely responsible for this. Visiting societies accused each other of imposing their own brands of Christianity on the poor. Anglican societies suspected that nonconformist visitors lured labouring people away from the Established Church and they disapproved of some of the methods that nonconformist charities employed, particularly lay interpretation of Scripture and open-air preaching.

Attempts to unify district visiting in London were not wholly successful. The City Missionary Society was established in 1824 as a nondenominational charity, but it folded in March 1825 after failing to win support from clergymen. Later in 1825 the Christian Instruction Society was founded as an umbrella society to regulate local visiting societies. Although professedly nondenominational, the

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[98] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 35; Russell, p. 167.
[99] Hewitt, 'District Visiting', p. 130.
[100] *Third Report of the London Stone District Visiting Society: Together with the Rules, List of Subscribers* (London: [n. pub.], 1834), pp. 7-8.

society was run predominantly by dissenters. Many local societies that had been established by nonconformist groups joined the Christian Instruction Society, but Anglican groups refused to collaborate and instead formed their own umbrella society, the General Society for Promoting District Visiting (District Visiting Society) in 1828. Some district visiting societies maintained their independence and did not associate with either the Christian Instruction Society or District Visiting Society. Complicating the situation further, some benevolent visiting societies continued to operate, paying little attention to the district visiting system. There were also people who visited independently, without official oversight.

This uncoordinated proliferation of visiting societies meant that the districts of visiting societies often overlapped. The Secretary of the Christian Instruction Society, John Blackburn, 'deprecated the practice of visitors of two or three different societies going over the same ground'.[101] While an individual visitor might carefully monitor how much she gave to a family, she might be unaware that the family also received charity from visitors affiliated with other charities. A household might capitalise on this, collecting large amounts of aid from multiple visitors. Philanthropists expressed concern that poor people who were exposed to conflicting doctrines would become confused and would cease to take Christianity seriously.[102] Rather than view religion as an investment in their soul, the poor might see its value only as a temporary guise to extract relief from visitors. John Blackburn also feared that the poor, sensing the religious competition between the charities, would place a price on their cooperation. He observed that poor parents demanded money from visitors before agreeing to send their children to school because they 'imagined that some party-purpose had been gained by [visitors] recruiting so zealously for them'.[103] Visitors may have been susceptible to these demands, for the competition between visitors was often far from 'imagined'. Aware that if they refused relief, the poor might seek out a visitor of a different sect, some visitors may have compromised their principles. A charitable handout was perhaps a small cost for visitors to pay if it kept potential converts under their influence. The system of recommending the poor to other

[101] HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 54.
[102] *The British Critic, and Quarterly Theological Review*, October 1840, p. 340.
[103] *The Educational Magazine*, January 1835, pp. 293-94.

charitable institutions may have been a compromise on the part of visitors. They arranged for the poor to have the material assistance that they desired without appearing to be giving handouts.

While there was an abundance of visitors in some parts of London, in others there were far too few. In theory, visitors would become so well acquainted with their respective sections that they would easily identify attempts to deceive them. The system of district visiting called for one visitor per section, but many societies struggled to meet even this most basic ratio. In 1832 the District Visiting Society reported that 'the want of Visitors is […] a subject of much complaint among the Local Societies'.[104] The local societies of the District Visiting Society had a combined total of 866 sections, yet only 573 visitors to canvass them.[105] The Christian Instruction Society had similar difficulties.[106] The charities struggled to find people who were willing to spend their time visiting the most deprived areas of the metropolis, where they would encounter poor living conditions, disease, and very likely hostility. And even if visiting societies managed to attract visitors, there was no guarantee that they would provide dedicated long-term service. The minute books of visiting societies reveal that there was a high turnover of visitors. Visitors resigned constantly, claiming that they were too preoccupied with other concerns or were moving out of the district.[107] Visitors' attention to visiting varied with the seasons. At a Christian Instruction Society meeting in August 1832, the Secretary reported that fewer families had been visited from mid-May to mid-August than had been visited in the preceding quarter because of a cholera outbreak and 'the usual absence of visitors from town at this period of the year'.[108] Presumably, middle-class visitors had curtailed their visiting because they did not wish to contract (or perhaps transmit) disease and because they had vacated their London homes for the countryside.

The scarcity of dedicated visitors meant that visitors were often spread thinly across districts and had heavy workloads. Embden Hoe was 'one of the most regular and punctual' visitors for the

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[104] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 24.
[105] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[106] By October 1826, more than a year after the foundation of the CIS, the system of domestic visitation had not been fully realised as there were too few agents. *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, October 1826, p. 435. See also *The Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, February 1834, p. 47.
[107] LMA, St Mary Newington District Visiting Society minute book, P92/MRY/257, 7 July 1834; LMA, Hoxton Auxiliary Christian Instruction Society minute book, N/C/19/010, 6 September 1827.
[108] *The Baptist Magazine*, October 1832, p. 446.

Portland Square District Visiting Society.[109] Many visitors went on their rounds only once a fortnight, but Mr Hoe visited for three of four hours each week. Even so, he found it 'impossible' to minister to all 120 families in his section and visited only eighty of them regularly.[110] The many visitors who were not so devoted as Mr Hoe likely had much less contact with the poor. The deficiency of visitors, both in terms of numbers and commitment, meant that many visitors may not have known the residents in their sections very well at all. The poor may have capitalised on this, supplying visitors with misleading information because they knew that visitors were unlikely to notice. Reverend Stone criticised a visitor who claimed to have visited 174 families over the course of a single week, while also running his counting house.[111] Stone believed that the visitor could only have visited so many households if he had cut corners, thus leaving himself open to exploitation.

Investigation was a key part of the district visiting system. Before granting relief, district visitors were expected to interview families, inspect their living conditions, and perhaps make inquiries in the neighbourhood. They were record the information they gathered in visitors' registers. At regular intervals, visitors were to submit reports to their society's governing board which, in turn, might make a report to an umbrella society. However, overworked and under-motivated visitors did not always conduct their investigations with rigour. During the early 1830s very few agents of the Long Acre District Visiting Society —as few as three out of ten visitors— submitted monthly reports to the governors. The District Visiting Society itself nagged in 1832 that unless visitors 'ma[de] regular Reports to their committees and these to the Central Committee, the whole system will be defective'.[112] The Christian Instruction Society had problems with local societies submitting incomplete reports or no reports at all.[113] The neglect of paperwork may suggest a more general inattention to investigation. Working-class people may have capitalised on this defect and misrepresented their circumstances, confident that visitors were unlikely to probe deeply.

[109] *District Visitor's Manual*, p. 74.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Stone, p. 11.
[112] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 43. See also *Principles and Plan*, p. 18.
[113] *Fifth Annual Report*, pp. 2, 10.

District visiting societies believed that the domestic environment reflected the economic and moral condition of its inhabitants. Thus, an untidy room with a fire stacked high with coals spoke of idleness and improvidence, but a neat room suggested respectable poverty. A well-thumbed Bible was evidence that its owners valued religion. District visitors prided themselves on their interpretive capabilities, their ability to 'read' the cleanliness, arrangement, and contents of homes. By considering this information alongside residents' statements and observations of their behaviour, visitors assessed whether relief was needed and deserved. Visitors' optimism that they could gain unobstructed insight into the lives of the poor was misplaced. There is some evidence that the poor concealed their real circumstances from visitors, instead presenting a false façade for their inspection. Homes were tidied, liquor was stashed away, and Bibles dusted off when visitors were expected.[114] Visitors interpreted this activity as proof of growing respectability and domestic pride, but its timing (right before visits) suggests that the poor had not fully embraced a new mode of living.

Critics of district visiting argued that many visitors were not suited to the role and were liable to accept 'impositions' as truth. The charities had such difficulty attracting volunteers that they could not afford to be choosy about who they engaged. They generally insisted only that visitors possess good Christian characters. Visitors with the Christian Instruction Society had to be members of a religious congregation whose pastor served as 'a security for [their] moral character and general consistency'.[115] Volunteers did not require past experience interacting with the poor, nor did they need to prove that they were organised, good record-keepers, or shrewd. The charities did not assist visitors to develop these desirable attributes, for training was minimal. At most, new visitors shadowed more experienced colleagues for a week or two before they took control of their own sections. Reverend Stone claimed that it was a rare visitor who possessed the 'enlarged views, extensive information, and long experience' that he believed were essential if the charities were to detect fraud and avoid cultivating dependence.[116]

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[114] *Principles and Plan*, p. 16; *The Christian Lady's Magazine*, April 1837, p. 330; *The British Critic, and Quarterly Theological Review*, October 1840, p. 350.
[115] The District Visiting Society sought people who were 'deeply impressed with divine truth, persons anxiously desirous to lead their fellow-creatures into the paths of true religion'. HCPP, Select Committee on Education, 1835, p. 95; *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 38.
[116] Stone, p. 37.

Stone argued that middle-class women were particularly ill-qualified for district visiting, for they lacked experience of the world and were gullible.[117] A writer in the *Westminster Review* alleged that novels had convinced ladies that visiting was a sentimental pursuit requiring only tenderness and sympathy and not the "'cold-blooded' calculation' that the system demanded.[118] Female visitors reportedly believed any heartrending story. Overcome by emotion, they gave far more relief than could rationally be justified. Lucy Aikin, a Unitarian writer, claimed that ladies were so caught up in the 'rage' for visiting that they created a 'positive demand for misery' with their 'incessant eagerness to relieve it'.[119] Such criticism of female visitors was not entirely fair. Like the governors of the vaccine charities, critics of district visiting voiced the sexist idea that women's emotions rendered them irrational. Autobiographies indicate that many female visitors took investigation seriously and did not view visiting solely as a fashionable pastime. Nevertheless, in some cases, poor people may have directed their tears and tales of woe at female visitors in the belief that ladies were soft touches. And, occasionally, such a strategy may have been successful. Reverend Leifchild claimed that the poor took advantage of his wife Elizabeth's 'credulity' when she began as a visitor for the Christian Instruction Society. She was bombarded with requests for relief and found it 'exceedingly difficult to discriminate' between them.[120] Mr Leifchild noted that Elizabeth's gifts met with little gratitude. Although he did not explain further, it is probable that the poor failed to correct their behaviour or express their thanks after receiving Mrs Leifchild's assistance. The poor may have expressed their agency as Peter Mandler suggests, 'fit[ting] themselves into the positions required by the donors at the moment of the transaction' and abandoning the pretence once they had won the prize.[121]

With the exception of the handful of working-class visitors, visitors —regardless of their sex— routinely found themselves in alien surrounds. The lifestyles and living conditions of the poor

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[117] Ibid.
[118] *The Westminster Review*, July 1824, p. 109. For a similar argument, see [Harriet Corp], *Tales Characteristic, Descriptive, and Allegorical* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1829), pp. 17-21.
[119] William Ellery Channing and Lucy Aikin, *Correspondence of William Ellery Channing, D.D. and Lucy Aikin, from 1826 to 1842*, ed. by Anna Leticia Le Breton (London: Williams and Norgate, 1874), p. 90.
[120] Leifchild, p. 34.
[121] Peter Mandler, 'Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis: An Introduction', in *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis*, ed. by Peter Mandler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 1-38 (p. 2).

often bore little resemblance to their own comfortable circumstances. Visitors observed working-class life, but they did not necessarily have the perspective to accurately contextualise their observations. Stone argued that, because visitors were unfamiliar with plebeian ways of life, they viewed poor households through the lens of their own middle-class standards. Visitors therefore overestimated the needs of the poor and distributed idleness-inducing amounts of relief.[122] Stone reported that one visitor gave a poor person four bushels of coal at once, when plebeians typically obtained only a quarter or an eighth of this quantity at a time.[123]

Critics of visiting societies were not alone in voicing this argument. A supporter of visiting societies noted, when wealthy visitors encountered circumstances that shocked them, they often imagined how they themselves would feel under those same circumstances. While empathy was admirable, the writer claimed that it might extend too far. Visitors might picture themselves in working-class circumstances, but they did not adjust their expectations accordingly. The writer argued that visitors could not comprehend that the poor did not always suffer under conditions that would be intolerable to their social superiors. The poor, he insisted, had a high tolerance to cold and hunger.[124] Because they interpreted working-class households through middle-class eyes, visitors 'relieved' where there was no suffering, thus encouraging poor people to feel a need for things that they had previously done perfectly well without. The writer advised visitors to ensure that they only offered relief where need truly existed and that the quantity and quality of assistance did not exceed working-class standards. He advised visitors that, if they came across ragged children, they should not outfit them with the same wardrobe they would give to their own offspring.[125] Commentators appeared to hint that the poor capitalised on visitors' middle-class standards by exaggerating their miseries and failing to inform visitors when relief was excessive. The author of *Essays on the Principles of Charitable Institutions* apparently believed that the poor could not be trusted to give an accurate

[122] Stone, p. 9.
[123] Ibid.
[124] *District Visitor's Manual*, pp. 267-68.
[125] Ibid., p. 269.

estimate of their needs, for she directed visitors to study 'the ordinary expenditure of the working classes' —not to ask the poor themselves— to prevent 'the most absurd mistakes'.[126]

The founders of district visiting societies were well aware that the poor were capable of deception; the system was designed to enable philanthropists to accurately assess the real condition of the poor and prevent imposition. However, plebeian families may have assumed a public transcript of extreme distress or of religiosity in visitors' presence, a transcript that they abandoned in their own company. Weaknesses in the district visiting system and in visitors' own perception may have created opportunities for the poor to exercise their agency through deception.

The Agency of Conversion

The reports of district visiting societies are replete with accounts of plebeians who exchanged their immoral habits for a virtuous Christian existence. Some of these people may have simply pretended to undergo conversion to impress district visitors. However, it may be wrong to assume that all plebeians who behaved piously were 'put[ting] on a little saintliness', as Lucy Aikin described it.[127] While sources that report such behaviour may not accurately document the voices of the poor, it is nonetheless possible that they reflect plebeian experiences in some measure. By conforming with the demands of district visitors, some individuals may have been able to escape situations in which they felt powerless. To represent the poor as people who were motivated solely by material concerns is to replicate Reverend Stone's stereotype of the relief-obsessed pauper. Historians must recognise that the poor may have exerted their agency on behalf of their souls.

District visiting societies claimed that vast numbers of poor Londoners were in a state of religious 'apathy' and 'indifference', a condition characterised by their neglect of the Bible and of church. District visitors aimed to dispel this passivity and transform the poor into active Christians who engaged personally with God. District visitors claimed that they brought spiritual guidance

[126] *Essays on the Principles of Charitable Institutions: Being an Attempt to Ascertain What Are the Plans Best Adapted to Improve the Physical and Moral Condition of the Lower Orders in England* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836), p. 221.
[127] Channing and Aikin, p. 90.

within reach of people who would otherwise be unable or unwilling to access it. The Christian Instruction Society reported that its tracts made the Word accessible to a deaf woman who could not hear sermons.[128] Prayer groups brought religion into the homes of poor people who were too ill, frail, or occupied with domestic concerns to attend formal services.[129] Visitors frequently read the Bible when on their rounds, enabling illiterate people to hear the gospel.[130]

District visiting societies claimed that their intervention enabled the poor to exert some control over their own spiritual welfare. The Christian Instruction Society related how a visitor in Shadwell discovered a young prostitute named Charlotte. The society described Charlotte's situation as one of physical and spiritual captivity. Confined to a brothel by a menacing madam, she could not seek out religious instruction, nor could she leave her sinful occupation. Charlotte reportedly declared on first meeting the visitor: 'I do want to know the way to heaven, I do not want food or clothes, but peace of mind'.[131] The visitor managed to remove the girl from the brothel and place her in a reformatory. In an annual report, the Christian Instruction Society reproduced a letter that it claimed Charlotte had written to her rescuer. It read:

> How good that Providence that first led you to the place where the fallen, the unhappy Charlotte, then was; *often*, indeed, have I wished for means to leave it, but no means were offered, no friendly hand was stretched out to save me […] never shall I forget those words which you […] spoke. The voice of a beloved parent seemed to speak; your kindness touched that heart long hardened in sin, and the guilty Charlotte was ready to embrace your offer [to remove her from the brothel]; since then how different my feelings[132]

With its emotive religious tropes ('friendly hand' and 'heart long hardened in sin'), its sophisticated grammar, and curious alteration between the first- and third-person voice, the letter does not seem like the product of an impoverished young woman. It is possible that a visitor or clergyman at the asylum penned the letter on her behalf, or that the district visitors wrote the letter. There was a long tradition of fictionalised accounts of reformed prostitutes.[133] Yet, even if the letter ventriloquises Charlotte, the

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[128] *Third Annual Report*, p. 35.
[129] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 33.
[130] Ibid.
[131] *Fifth Annual Report*, p. 8.
[132] Ibid.
[133] See for example *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen-House, as Supposed to Be Related by Themselves*, 2 vols (London: John Rivington, 1760); [Martin Madan], *The Magdalen: or Dying Penitent. Exemplified in the Life of F.S.* (Dublin: Bennett Dugdale, 1781); *Memoir of Elizabeth Kenning, with Extracts*

basic feelings it conveys should not be automatically dismissed as false. Poor people may have felt that district visiting helped them to escape situations in which they had little freedom and to exert control over their own material circumstances. Moreover, for some people, district visiting was also a means through which they could obtain the spiritual comfort that they craved.

District visitors claimed that people in ruddy health were frequently interested only in worldly concerns, such as providing for their families or seeking pleasure. Visitors reported, however, that the priorities of many poor people shifted when they were seriously ill. The possibility of impending death turned their attention towards the state of the immortal souls. Visitors reported that the dying often felt powerless. Some poor people believed themselves unable to face or unprepared for death, yet were helpless to halt its advance on them. One woman reportedly described her state as that of 'a convicted sinner about to meet approaching judgment totally unprepared'.[134] Visitors claimed that others viewed death with apathetic despondency, convinced that they had little chance of reaching heaven.

Visitors believed that many poor people did not understand the mechanisms of salvation. They stated that some plebeians thought that their conduct on earth —their 'free agency'— determined how they would stand before God after their death. One poor woman reportedly believed in the power of good works; she hoped that 'if she exercised kindness to her neighbours, God would look graciously upon her'.[135] A young man 'evidently hoped that his tears and repentance would atone for his sins'.[136] Visitors claimed that such beliefs about salvation contributed to feelings of powerless as death neared. They reported that the dying frequently believed that they had not done enough to save themselves and that, as their lives drew to a close, they felt that they did not have enough time to alter their situation. District visitors attempted to disabuse the poor of such notions and instead impress on them the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Visitors' accounts of deathbed

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from Her Remains, 2nd edn (Liverpool: D. Marples, 1829). See also Laura J. Rosenthal, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Sarah Lloyd, '"Pleasure's Golden Bait": Prostitution, Poverty and the Magdalen Hospital in Eighteenth-Century London', *History Workshop Journal*, 41 (1996), 50-70.

[134] *Christian Instruction Society*, p. 15.

[135] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 35.

[136] Ibid., p. 34.

conversions relate that poor people surrendered themselves entirely to God, entrusting their salvation to God's hands rather than their own. Visitors noted that new-found faith dispelled feelings of powerless. According to visitors, converts died peacefully, comforted that —by embracing God— they had done the only thing that they could possibly do to preserve their souls. One poor woman, converted on her deathbed, was reported to have uttered: 'I have committed myself […] into the hands of my Saviour. Although I have so lately commenced my journey, I feel satisfied that he who led me into the way of peace, will bring me safely to the end'.[137]

Visitors' reports of conversions are problematic sources. Visitors did not have direct access to poor people's thoughts and beliefs and may have misrepresented them. District visiting societies may have embellished tales to promote their organisations. What better way to attract subscribers than with sentimental tales of reformed sinners? Visitors' accounts of conversion are representations, 'public transcripts' that they fed to the public. However, representations are not necessarily fictions; some tales may reflect genuine feelings. Many historians are uncomfortable with the idea that the poor were genuinely enthusiastic about middle-class projects to convert them. They have a soft spot for plucky underdogs who resisted authority and refused to accept middle-class values. When historians encounter evidence of plebeians conforming, they frequently dismiss the evidence as a fabrication or argue that conformity was a 'public transcript' used to secure relief or avoid negative attention from authorities. A 'hidden transcript' of antagonism is assumed to lie just under the surface. However, there is an alternative interpretation: that the outward conduct of the poor reflected their internal state. From their viewpoint in the twenty-first century, historians typically see agency in secular and individualist terms. Yet, agency may have assumed forms in the past that are alien to modern understandings of the term. Phyllis Mack argues that the definition of agency as autonomy is too limited and that there could be agency in choosing to surrender oneself to God's will.[138] Mack refers to Quakers in the eighteenth century, yet her argument may also apply to the men and women who were converted by district visitors in the early nineteenth century.

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[137] *Fifth Annual Report*, p. 7.
[138] Phyllis Mack, 'Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism', *Signs*, 29 (2003), 149-77.

Many historians who seek to discover the agency of the poor portray religion as an oppressive force. Thompson describes Methodist chapels as 'great traps for the human psyche'.[139] However, if visitors' reports are to be believed, some poor people found in religion an outlet for their initiative and for their voice. District visitors hoped that the poor would not just passively receive their instruction. Like the founders of infant schools, district visitors encouraged the poor to take an active role in their own moral and spiritual development. District visiting societies looked favourably on plebeians who expressed themselves openly in conversation with visitors and in religious gatherings, so long as the poor espoused views that accorded with their own. As Emma Griffin argues, the 'evangelical revival provided a platform for working-class expression'.[140] Prayer meetings were 'a place where the poor were encouraged to speak' and where they could 'experience […] having [their] voice heard'.[141] Visitors reported with pride that poor people organised meetings to read and discuss the Bible.[142] Some beneficiaries of district visiting became agents of the societies. They distributed tracts among their neighbours or opened up their homes for prayer meetings.[143] The District Visiting Society claimed that one woman began visiting the sick after receiving visits herself.[144] There were also accounts of poor people donating to visiting societies.[145]

The York Street Chapel Christian Instruction Society related that its visits so affected one man that he:

> offered the gratuitous use of his own room for a prayer-meeting, printed the notices [for this meeting] at his own charge, adding at the bottom, 'Serve God and God will serve you'. He also insisted on subscribing 10s. to the Society, as a proof of their gratitude for its labours[146]

This was not a ritualistic return for the charitable gift. The man voluntarily sacrificed his time, his income, and his space for the society. He embraced the charity's ethos as his own, finding in it a sense of purpose, an opportunity to show his initiative, and perhaps even standing within his community. He

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[139] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), p. 368.
[140] Emma Griffin, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 201.
[141] Ibid., p. 195.
[142] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 35.
[143] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 22, p. 33; *Christian Instruction Society*, p. 10, p. 15, p. 16.
[144] *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 34.
[145] Ibid., p. 37.
[146] *Third Annual Report*, p. 13; *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 37.

cast off his status as an object of the charity and became an active promoter of the society. His choice of words for the prayer meeting notices —'Serve God and God will serve you'— suggests that he had discovered a certain power in being a conduit of God's will. He was confident that his devotion would be rewarded. Historians tend to view agency in terms of individual autonomy. However, examples like this suggest that there may be agency in the instrumental sense of acting as an agent. An individual's influence might be greatest, and his or her interests best served, if he or she harnessed her energies to a collective or divine plan.

Conclusions

The district visiting societies aimed to permeate the darkest corners of the metropolis, to bring the light of Christianity to the most dissipated Londoners. By entering the homes of the poor, visitors hoped to see the real economic and spiritual condition of the poor. However, this chapter illustrates that seeing was not straightforward. Some poor people obstructed visitors, denying them access to their homes and rejecting their 'friendly' advances. Others exercised their agency through deception, assuming the veneer of religiosity or distress to secure assistance from visitors. Weaknesses in visitors' perception and interpretation —their reluctance to probe deeply, their susceptibility to credit heartrending tales, their tendency to measure need using middle-class standards— may have made them easy targets for deception. Indeed, visitors may have been subjected to greater surveillance than the poor. Plebeians took careful note of visitors' beliefs and practices, for such knowledge allowed them to fine-tune their performances to their audiences. As Peter Mandler observes, historians often believe that the rich knew more about the poor than the poor knew about the rich, 'not for any […] analytic reasons, but simply because the rich have left behind them so many more (and more articulate) evidences of their social knowledge whereas the poor remained comparatively dumb'.[147] Mandler claims that the reality was probably the reverse of what historians assume, because for the

[147] Mandler, p. 1.

poor understanding others was not a 'luxury' —as it was for the rich— but could be 'essential to survival'.[148]

However, survival was not the only matter that motivated the poor. Many plebeians were as concerned about the state of their souls as the state of their finances. District visitors reported that they converted many poor people to Christianity. According to visitors, the dying were relieved of their hopelessness and anxiety when they committed their souls to God. Healthy converts not only assumed responsibility for their own religious practice, they also frequently became agents of district visiting. It is tempting to dismiss such tales as wishful thinking on the part of district visitors. Yet, while the tales are designed to promote the societies, they may nonetheless reflect the experiences of poor people. Historians frequently assume that resistance lies just beneath the surface of compliant behaviour. However, in doing so, they neglect to consider that those who cooperated with district visitors may have genuinely valued their religious teachings.

[148] Ibid.

6. The Society for the Suppression of Mendicity

Reverend Stone's tale of the Spitalfields family features dozens of charities. However, the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity is not among them. There are likely several reasons for this. While most of the charities in the tale catered to poor families who had homes and employment, the Mendicity Society's clientele of beggars and vagrants were at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale. Stone may also have excluded the Mendicity Society from his tale because he exempted it from the charges that he levelled at other charities. The Mendicity Society was, in many respects, a charity after Reverend Stone's heart. Its governors shared Stone's conviction that the poor were frequently guilty of imposture. Most charities —not least the district visiting societies— were wary of fraud, but the Mendicity Society took this suspicion to the extreme. Its system for exposing the undeserving was more rigorous than that of any other charity in early nineteenth-century London. Indeed, inquiry was the *raison d'être* of the charity. Montagu Burgoyne, a supporter of the society, declared that 'investigation and discrimination [were] the life and soul of [the] Institution'.[1] Clerks at the Mendicity Office examined the cases of thousands of mendicants each year, while Mendicity constables patrolled the streets, arresting imposters and sturdy beggars. Stone believed that the poor's manipulation of relief was not entirely responsible for dependency and idleness. He insisted that careless charitable giving enabled and even encouraged vice. The Mendicity Society agreed, claiming that almsgivers fuelled mendicants' immoral lifestyles with ill-considered handouts. The Mendicity Society waged a war on two fronts against begging. It aimed both to reduce the demand for alms by removing beggars from the streets and to cut off the supply of alms by re-educating Londoners, persuading them that it was unwise to give money to beggars.

The founders of the Mendicity Society considered it a national embarrassment that the streets of the most prosperous city in Europe were infested with beggars. In a city that prided itself on enterprise and industry, it was scandalous that vast numbers of people relied on others for their living.

[1] Montagu Burgoyne, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Sturges Bourne, M.P. from Montagu Burgoyne, Esq. on the Subject of the Removal of the Irish* (London: J. Shaw, 1820), p. 37.

The charity argued that beggars were not only unproductive; they also impeded commerce by blocking the streets and annoying workers who were trying to go about their business. With their ragged appearance and physical infirmities (that the society insisted were usually faked), mendicants were also a visual blight on the orderly metropolis. In the charity's view, beggars' far-fetched tales of woe and crude street performances lowered the moral tone of the city. The Mendicity Society aspired to clean up the streets and to transform beggars from parasites into industrious citizens who contributed to England's economic strength. The society had similar aims as other charities in London had. The infant schools tried to remove children from the streets and so address the nuisance of juvenile delinquency. Like the Mendicity Society, infant schools and district visiting societies wanted the poor to be economically independent.

The Mendicity Society may have had similar goals as other charities, but its methods were very different. Unlike so many of its contemporaries, the Mendicity Society placed no emphasis on religion. It was not affiliated with a church and it was, according to M.J.D. Roberts, 'the most undisguisedly secular' of moral reform societies in the early nineteenth century.[2] The Mendicity Society rejected the evangelical philanthropy that was pervasive in London. It viewed beggars as economic and social problems, rather than souls in need of saving. Infant schools and district visiting societies combatted antisocial behaviour by encouraging the poor to adopt good morals and an attitude of self-help. By contrast, the Mendicity Society was not interested in the internal formation of character. It embraced the doctrine of utility in the place of Christian precepts. It was obsessed with the choices that beggars and almsgivers made and the consequences of those choices. The Mendicity Society depicted beggars as manipulative, strategic, and vocal —qualities that might be labelled as agency. The charity claimed that most beggars exerted control over their own circumstances. It argued that, in most cases, poor people were not forced into begging, but chose the lucrative trade of begging over honest labour. The Mendicity Society believed that beggars used their powers for inappropriate ends. Instead of directing their energy and ingenuity towards productive industry, they used it to swindle relief from almsgivers and so live in idle dissipation. The stereotypes of the sturdy beggar and

[2] M.J.D. Roberts, 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship: The London Mendicity Society and the Suppression of Begging in England 1818-1869', *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1991), 201-31 (p. 211).

the imposter formed the basis of the Mendicity Society's rhetoric, informing the charity's policies regarding material relief, work, and policing. The charity argued that beggars would only abandon their illegal conduct if external pressure were brought to bear on their choices. The Mendicity Society believed that deterrence and punishment, combined with a clampdown on begging opportunities, would force mendicity into extinction.

Concerned primarily with questions of utility, the Mendicity Society was largely dismissive about the spirit in which charity was distributed; it did not value the sentimentality or condescension of district visitors. Indeed, it argued that sentimental almsgivers fell prey to deception. It was the society's view that almsgiving did far more harm than good. The Mendicity Society argued that the merit of charity ought to be judged according to the consequences it produced, rather than the intentions behind it. The charity's motto, *benefacta male collocate, malefacta existima* ('good deeds misplaced, methinks, are evil deeds'), reflected its utilitarian outlook in its suggestion that good intentions did not guarantee positive outcomes.[3]

The charities examined thus far tended to confine their efforts within a small remit and seldom became involved in controversial political issues. The Mendicity Society, by comparison, had a much greater public presence. The society was not inward-looking, but viewed itself as a central cog in a larger machine of welfare and police. The founders of the society aspired to revolutionise how society as whole viewed begging. They believed that they could convince parish authorities, magistrates, lawmakers, the press, and almsgivers to toe their Malthusian line. The charity actively campaigned for changes to the poor laws and vagrancy statues and it criticised official institutions when it felt they were remiss. The society's constabulary force performed a function that ought to have been the responsibility of the government.

[3] The motto is derived from Ennius. Cicero wrote of Ennius: 'It will be the duty of charity to incline more to the unfortunate, unless, perchance, they deserve their misfortune. But of course we ought by no means to withhold our assistance altogether from those who wish for aid, not to save them from utter ruin but to enable them to reach a higher degree of fortune. But in selecting worthy cases, we ought to use judgment and discretion. For, as Ennius says so admirably, "Good deeds misplaced, methinks, are evil deeds"'. I am grateful to Victor Connerty for translating and identifying the source of the motto. Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. by Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library, 30 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), p. 235.

Historians recognise that the governors of the Mendicity Society were politically active, yet they are reluctant to extend political awareness to the poor people who came under the charity's eye. E.P. Thompson characterised plebeian agency as political in nature. Recent work on the agency of the poor, however, distances itself from Thompson's precedent and focuses more on how working-class people secured their survival than how they defended their rights and customary expectations. This has been particularly the case with regard to beggars. Lynn MacKay claims that poor people disliked the Mendicity Society because it compromised their respectability.[4] She argues that the poor valued their respectability because it secured them material advantage. Missing from MacKay's account is any indication that Mendicity clients also viewed respectability in broader terms as integral to their rights and freedoms. Historians occasionally dismiss evidence of political views among mendicants. In his study of the Mendicity Society, M.J.D. Roberts briefly refers to John James Bezer, a man who claimed that his experience of applying at the Mendicity Society compelled him to become a Chartist. Roberts states that Bezer, as an articulate person from an artisanal background, cannot be relied on for a 'typical response' to the society.[5] Bezer's autobiography is a rare account of the Mendicity Society from the perspective of a client. However, Bezer's attitude towards the Mendicity Society was not so unusual as Roberts suggests. Bezer's opinions find strong echoes in the behaviour and recorded statements of other people who came into contact with the Mendicity Society. Like Bezer, many working-class people argued that the Mendicity Society was an oppressive institution that trampled on the rights of free born Englishmen. They insisted that the charity aggravated dependence by treating the poor inhumanely and by failing to acknowledge —much less address— the economic problems that obliged the poor to scrape a living on the streets.

Opposition to the Mendicity Society did not take the form of a simple binary class conflict. People of many different classes and political leanings criticised the Mendicity Society's actions and advocated alternative methods to address begging. While some beggars did not articulate political opinions in their dealings with the Mendicity Society, resistance to the Mendicity Society from other spheres of society nonetheless shored up plebeian agency, allowing the poor greater scope to pursue

[4] Lynn MacKay, 'The Mendicity Society and Its Clients: A Cautionary Tale', *Left History*, 5 (1997), 39-64.
[5] Roberts, 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship', pp. 223-24.

the economic activities of which the Mendicity Society so disapproved. The first section of this chapter illustrates the development of the Mendicity Society and its techniques. Each of the subsequent three sections examines a controversial aspect of the Mendicity Society's activities. The central argument of this chapter is that plebeian agency was not simply concerned with material advantage, but engaged with a broader spectrum of concerns, encompassing notions of rights and social obligations. These notions were not confined to the poor, but extended across class boundaries, ensuring that beggars benefited from a large number of supporters in their opposition to the Mendicity Society.

The section on the agency of giving focuses on objections to the Mendicity Society's attempts to redefine charitable giving. Beggars criticised the Mendicity Society's system of tickets and investigation not only for compromising their income, but also for disregarding their right to humane treatment. Critics of the Mendicity Society supported beggars by challenging the utilitarian arguments with which the society justified its anti-almsgiving rhetoric and by taking issue with the society's secretiveness. When solicited for handouts, many almsgivers preferred to consult their own judgment or Christian principles, instead of surrendering control to a private organisation.

The Mendicity Society insisted that the vast majority of beggars were idle. The section on agency and industry reveals that this claim was widely contested. Beggars frequently emphasised their lack of agency, arguing that begging was a necessity borne out of desperation, not a choice. The charity's scanty material relief and backbreaking work programmes were roundly dismissed as inadequate and insulting solutions to the economic problems that compelled the poor to beg. To plebeian and Chartist eyes, the thin soup, stone-breaking, and oakum-picking of the Mendicity Society seemed more in line with the cruel injustices of the prisons and New Poor Law than with compassionate charity. Street hawkers and street entertainers defended themselves against the Mendicity Society's attempts to brand them as beggars; they argued that their public activities constituted legitimate work and that the charity acted illegally by prosecuting them. The concluding section of this chapter considers criticism of the Mendicity Society's policing efforts. Beggars and Chartists likened the society's officers to the cruel *mouchards* of the *Ancien Regime*, while even non-

radical commentators joined in to denunciate the Mendicity Society for its heavy-handed tactics and accused it of bending the law to its own purposes.

Historical Context

The destitute poor were a persistent problem. Periodic crises about beggars and vagrants occurred throughout the course of English history.[6] In the late eighteenth century, Thomas Malthus trained the attention of civic-minded citizens on the economic productivity of the poor. To followers of Malthus, beggars seemed the epitome of useless consumers. Living off handouts, they did not contribute to the economy through their own labour. Poor-law reformers argued that the millions of pounds distributed annually as parish relief proved that paupers drained England of its finite resources. John Marriott states that many wealthy Britons believed that the beggarly poor tarnished London's status as a 'showcase capital city'.[7] Beggars and vagrants —disorderly, unsightly, and criminal— were the opposite of what political economists wanted London to be.

The Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (SBCP), an evangelical charity that disseminated information about poverty and plans for its alleviation, described how mendicity 'spread[-] like infection […] paralysing the industry and energy of the poor'.[8] The secretary of the SBCP was Matthew 'Mendicity' Martin, a merchant and naturalist. With the backing of the SBCP, Martin launched an investigation in 1796 to establish the extent and causes of begging in the metropolis. He printed 6000 tickets that he gave to members of the public, instructing them to distribute the tickets to beggars on the streets.[9] If beggars presented their tickets at Martin's Mendicity Enquiry Office, they received a small monetary award and were interviewed. With his naturalist's

[6] Tim Hitchcock, 'The London Vagrancy Crisis of the 1780s', *Rural History*, 24 (2013), 59-72.
[7] John Marriott, 'The Spatiality of the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London', in *The Streets of London: From the Great Fire to the Great Stink*, ed. by Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore (London: Rivers Oram, 2003), pp. 119-34 (p. 123).
[8] This quote described begging in Hamburg in 1789, but the SBCP evidently believed that the situation in London was comparable. *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor,* 6 vols (London: W. Bulmer, 1797-1814), II (1799), p. 315.
[9] Sarah Lloyd, 'Ticketing the British Eighteenth Century: 'A Thing… Never Heard of Before', *Journal of Social History*, 46 (2013), 843-71 (pp. 843-44, 854).

enthusiasm for documentation and classification, Martin recorded each beggar's native place, family, and economic circumstances.

Martin and his clerks collected the cases of 2300 individuals by 1803. From this Martin extrapolated that there were 15,288 beggars in the city.[10] He estimated that more than half of this number did not have parish settlements in London and that thirty-five percent of the mendicant population was Irish.[11] Martin's findings reflected the extent of immigration to London in the early nineteenth century, particularly from Ireland. Between 1780 and 1840 approximately 600,000 people immigrated to Britain hoping to escape subsistence crises and poor economic conditions in Ireland.[12] Immigrants who failed to secure work in London might turn to begging. Women accounted for ninety percent of Martin's sample.[13] Although women may have been more willing than men to present themselves at the office, the preponderance of women in Martin's sample nevertheless reflects the fact that there were far more female than male beggars in London, perhaps due to women's vulnerability within the labour market.[14]

Martin identified several circumstances that he believed led the poor down the slippery slope to mendicity. He suggested that some beggars were responsible for their own degradation, having succumbed to the moral failings of 'voluntary idleness or delinquency'.[15] He argued that certain household practices, such as pawning and small-scale purchasing, compromised economic security and might lead to begging. While some of Martin's contemporaries attributed these practices to the improvidence of the working class, Martin seemed to blame a lack of financial alternatives.[16] Martin may also have subscribed to the SBCP's argument that insufficient education resulted in poor domestic economy. Martin claimed that the poor frequently turned to begging when they fell victim to

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[10] Matthew Martin, *Letter to the Right Hon. Lord Pelham, on the State of Mendicity in the Metropolis* (London: Philanthropic Society, [1803]), p. 19.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Patty Seleski, 'Identity, Immigration, and the State: Irish Immigrants and English Settlement in London, 1790-1840', in *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, ed. by George K. Behlmer and Fred M. Leventhal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 11-27 (pp. 15-16).
[13] Matthew Martin, p. 12.
[14] Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 478-98 (pp. 489-90).
[15] Matthew Martin, p. 17.
[16] Martin referred to the 'difficulty or impossibility of laying by a weekly sum sufficient to discharge the expense of lodging'. He suggested that poor domestic economy was not due to lack of will on the part of the poor. Ibid.

personal and financial circumstances that were beyond their control, such as injury or unemployment. Martin believed that the poor law did not do enough to relieve distress, leaving many people with little alternative but to turn to begging. He criticised parish authorities' reluctance to grant out relief and condemned the settlement system because it prevented many people who were not settled Londoners from securing relief in the metropolis.[17]

In 1803 Martin outlined a plan to address begging in a letter to the Home Secretary. He proposed that London be divided into five geographical sections. Each of these sections would have its own office and a commissioner. The offices would investigate beggars and would assist them to obtain parish relief, removal back to their native communities, employment, or material relief. Martin insisted that religious education was also essential if beggars were to learn the value of industry and honesty.[18] The government did not institute Martin's plan, perhaps because the cost was prohibitive or because it felt that existing institutions could provide the services that Martin recommended. Nevertheless, Parliament was sufficiently interested in Martin's research to fund a second inquiry that Martin conducted from 1811 to 1815.

Martin presented the findings of his second inquiry to the Select Committee on Mendicity and Vagrancy in 1815. Mendicity was then a pressing concern as the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars had brought an influx of discharged servicemen into England. This, together with economic depression, worsened the begging problem. In his evidence before the committee Martin focused on the 'real distress' that drove the decent poor to beg, but he also conceded that there were professional beggars who manufactured tales of woe.[19] Other commentators elaborated on this, arguing that many mendicants were not as destitute as they claimed to be and spent their ill-gotten gains on immoral pursuits. The committee recommended the establishment of an institution to investigate beggars and to assist the public to distinguish 'suffering mendicants whose wretchedness is owing to misfortune' and who deserved charity from 'importunate and clamorous beggars' who did not.[20]

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., pp. 25-26.
[19] HCPP, Select Committee on State of Mendicity in Metropolis, 1814-15 (473), III.231, p. 6.
[20] HCPP, Select Committee on State of Mendicity in Metropolis, 1816 (396), V.391, p. 12.

The government showed little inclination to act on its own recommendation following the Mendicity Commission. Yet, to many philanthropists, it was obvious that existing mechanisms were inadequate to combat begging. A parliamentary inquiry in 1818 highlighted the failings of the poor laws. Parish officials routinely ignored their duty to relieve the distressed or to pass them to their parishes of settlement.[21] Beadles and parish constables were criticised for turning a blind eye to begging.[22] Founded in January 1818, the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity aimed to take action where state agencies were not and to exert pressure on poor law and policing officials to perform their legal responsibilities.

The Mendicity Society employed many of Martin's techniques. The charity copied Martin's ticket system and established an office at Red Lion Square in Holborn, where clerks investigated beggars' circumstances.[23] However, the charity departed from Martin's precedent in significant ways. The Mendicity Society was much more suspicious of mendicants than Martin had been. Whereas Martin believed that only a minority of beggars were imposters, the Mendicity Society insisted that the majority were so. Martin declared that begging was frequently the 'effect of misfortune, rather than of choice; of the want of means, rather than the want of will to maintain themselves'.[24] The Mendicity Society, however, claimed that most beggars turned to begging not out of necessity, but because they disliked work. To the governors of the charity, mendicity and mendacity were synonymous. Martin appeared to have generally accepted mendicants' statements as truth, but the Mendicity Society felt that it could not trust beggars to accurately represent their circumstances. Mendicity clerks sought to corroborate (or disprove) mendicants' claims by corresponding with references, consulting with parish authorities, and compiling records of beggars' brushes with the law. In 1820 the Mendicity Society branched out from street mendicity and opened a begging letter department. The charity encouraged Londoners to send any begging letters they received to the office,

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[21] HCPP, Select Committee to Consider Poor Laws, 1818 (107), V.1.
[22] Lionel Rose, *Rogues and Vagabonds: Vagrant Underworld in Britain, 1815-1985* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 7.
[23] The Mendicity Society used tickets in a slightly different way than Martin had done. The Mendicity Society encouraged the public to use tickets instead of cash handouts. Martin had not viewed tickets as a replacement for alms, but solely as an 'administrative device' that would assist him to collect and document beggars. Lloyd, 'Ticketing the British Eighteenth-Century', p. 854.
[24] Matthew Martin p. 12.

where it would investigate letter writers' claims. This chapter will focus primarily on the society's approach to street begging, for this was its primary concern.[25] Martin's investigations were attempts to understand why people begged. By contrast, the Mendicity Society conducted inquiries to establish deservingness. If the charity determined that beggars were 'worthy', they offered assistance to re-establish their economic independence. Those found to be sturdy beggars or imposters, however, were to be punished. Punitive consequences for begging had not featured in Martin's plans.

Religion may explain why the Mendicity Society took a much harder line towards begging than Martin had done. While Martin was backed by the Evangelical SBCP, the Mendicity had no religious affiliation. Although some evangelicals were associated with the Mendicity Society, they did not subscribe in large numbers.[26] Evangelical philanthropists emphasised the formation and reformation of character. However, the Mendicity Society viewed morality as relatively static. The cases in the society's reports fall into two categories. There are the virtuous beggars who overcome temporary distress with the charity's assistance. And then there are the degraded mendicants whose every interaction with the society is defined by deceit and ingratitude. For these, there is no moral evolution, no moment of conversion. The Mendicity Society believed that sturdy beggars and imposters were too dissipated to be reclaimed through appeals to the spirit; begging could only be eradicated if external pressure were brought to bear on beggars. By making begging both unprofitable and unpleasant, the charity hoped it would force beggars to abandon the practice. Ignoring Martin's recommendation for religious education, the Mendicity Society focused on policing. From its first year in operation, the charity had constables who patrolled the streets, arresting people they took to be beggars and vagrants. Officers brought them to the police courts in the hope that magistrates would order summary punishment, typically a spell in a house of correction. Punishment was not intended to reform. The governors of the Mendicity Society did not consider houses of correction to be corrective

[25] Most begging-letter writers were a class apart from street beggars, for they were generally more professional and more literate. Much more evidence exists of the charity's street policing, because it took place in public, than of its private investigations into begging letters.
[26] Roberts, 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship', p. 211-12.

institutions.[27] However, they did believe that punishment could be an effective deterrent against begging.

The Mendicity Society built on the precedent of moral reform societies. In 1787 William Wilberforce founded the Proclamation Society to enforce King George's proclamation against profane and immoral behaviour.[28] The Society for the Suppression of Vice superseded the Proclamation Society in 1802. Like the Mendicity Society, the Vice Society argued that public authorities had failed to address antisocial behaviour and that its private initiative was required to enforce laws. The Vice Society brought prosecutions for blasphemy, drunkenness, obscenity, and other moral offences.[29] The Mendicity Society shared the Vice Society's concern for policing, yet there were clear differences between the charities. The Mendicity Society was a much larger organisation that the Vice Society. In 1824 the Mendicity Society received nearly three thousand pounds in donations and its subscription list ran to forty-six pages.[30] By comparison, the Vice Society's subscription list was nine pages long in 1825.[31] The Mendicity Society was also more professional than the Vice Society. While the latter relief on a mix of volunteer informers and paid officers, the Mendicity Society employed a dedicated staff of clerks and constables.

M.J.D. Roberts identifies many aristocrats among the patrons of the Mendicity Society.[32] Prominent men such as the magistrate Patrick Colquhuoun were figureheads for the society; however, Roberts claims that the charity's most active supporters were those who saw the society 'as a means of furthering their existing interest in schemes to promote economic and moral self-discipline among

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[27] Like many prison reformers, Mendicity officials believed that moral corruption spread from inmate to inmate in crowded prisons. Montagu Burgoyne, p. 40.
[28] The Proclamation Society was inspired by seventeenth-century moral reform societies. Joanna Innes, Inferior *Politics: Social Problems and Social Policies in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 184, 191.
[29] For more information about the Vice Society see M.J.D. Roberts, 'The Society for the Suppression of Vice and Its Early Critics, 1802-1812', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), 159-76; M.J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Philips, 'Good Men to Associate and Bad Men to Conspire: Associations for the Prosecution of Felons in England, 1760-1860', in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain, 1750-1850*, ed. by Douglas Hay and Francis Snyder (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 113-70.
[30] *The Seventh Report of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, Established in London, 1818* (London: F. Warr, 1825), pp. 30, 55-100.
[31] *Society for the Suppression of Vice* (London: S. Gosnell, 1825), pp. 13-21.
[32] Roberts, 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship', p. 213.

the labouring classes'.[33] These included the MPs William Sturges Bourne and Montagu Burgoyne who advocated for poor law reform. Young professionals and businessmen, looking to advance their careers, also assumed leading roles in the society.[34] The most prominent was William Henry Bodkin, an auctioneer and former parish overseer. Bodkin was the foremost spokesman for the society during the 1820s. Although he was nominally 'Honorary' Secretary, Bodkin received a generous salary. Many early nineteenth-century charities expected their officials to offer their services gratis or for a small gratuity. By granting salaries to its staff, the Mendicity Society demonstrated a commitment to professional management. As the previous chapter has shown, volunteers could be unreliable and inconsistent. The Mendicity Society wanted to avoid all accusations of amateurishness. The society held that professionals possessed the dedication, the knowledge, and the emotional detachment to carry out their duties with scientific precision.

Agency and Giving

By 1822 the Mendicity Society had six clerks to conduct inquiries and six constables to police the streets.[35] This professional force was costly. In 1824 *The Times* criticised the Mendicity Society for spending half of its income on investigating and arresting beggars. The newspaper alleged that the charity had misled subscribers who believed that their donations would relieve, rather than punish, beggars. The accusation prompted the Mendicity Society to clarify its aims. It stated that it 'ha[d] never assumed the title of "Charitable" according to the common acceptation of the term. It has never been pretended that its funds are subscribed for the purpose of being "divided among the Beggars", as the Times asserts'.[36] The Mendicity Society was a charity in some respects; it was supported by donations and desired social improvement. However, it was not charitable in the sense of tender-heartedness, generosity, or a willingness to think well of others. The society argued that these were

[33] Ibid., p. 209.
[34] Ibid.
[35] *The Fourth Report of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, Established in London, 1818* (London: F. Warr, 1822), p. v.
[36] BL, Society for the Suppression of Mendicity minute book, Add MS 50136, p. 232.

dangerous qualities in philanthropists, for charitable people were easily duped into distributing harmful amounts of relief.

The Mendicity Society aspired to radically change the nature of charitable giving. Convinced that almsgivers lacked the ability and desire to accurately assess beggars' deservingness, the society directed them to outsource investigation to the Mendicity Office. The charity implored the public to give Mendicity Society tickets to beggars, instead of money. The society believed that beggars preyed on sympathy with their sorrowful tales and distorted bodies. To avoid falling victim to such scams, the society argued that both its own officials and the public must maintain their emotional distance from mendicants and regard them with suspicion. The Mendicity Society wished charity to be a scientific process in which the rational processes of investigation and discrimination supplanted the impulses of the heart.

This section shows that the Mendicity Society's attempt to redefine the roles of both giver and recipient in the gift exchange did not go smoothly. Indeed, the society's plan came into conflict with a host of established precedents and values that many Englishmen and women held dear. Beggars were unenthusiastic about the Mendicity Society's vision of charity. It was common for mendicants to reject tickets and to refuse to go to the Mendicity Office at Red Lion Square. Some beggars verbally or physically assaulted people who attempted to give them tickets. When one woman was offered a ticket, she reportedly exclaimed, 'What! you belong to that gang, do you? The sooner you get out the better!!!'[37] The Mendicity Society declared that the refusal of a ticket was '*primae faciae* evidence of unworthiness' and that mendicants who avoided the Mendicity Office did so because they feared detection as imposters or sturdy beggars.[38] Some beggars undoubtedly declined tickets because they feared punishment or because they preferred to hold out for cash handouts. However, others seem to have objected to the spirit in which the tickets were offered and the suspicion with which the Mendicity Society and its supporters viewed them.

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[37] Edward Pelham Brenton, *A Letter to the Committee of Management of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, in Red Lion Square* (London: C. Rice, 1830), p. 13.
[38] *The Third Report of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity, Established in London, 1818* (London: J.F. Dove, 1821), pp. 10-11.

The blind man Job Hecksey claimed his begging patch outside St James' Palace in about 1800, long before the foundation of the Mendicity Society. He solicited alms from the MPs and gentlemen who patronised clubs in the area. In 1840 he was featured in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, in one of the many journalistic accounts of London 'low life' to appear in the mid-nineteenth century.[39] The authors claimed to have interviewed Hecksey. Hecksey contrasted the aristocrats who regularly paused to give him coins with Mendicity supporters who 'just ha[d] time to fling a Mendicity ticket into one's face'.[40] Hecksey disliked the deleterious effect of tickets on his income, but this was not the sole reason for his complaint. He was insulted by the way in which Mendicity supporters treated him. Tickets absolved givers of the need to engage personally with beggars, for the ticket system placed the task of probing beggars' tales solely within the hands of the Mendicity Society. Hecksey objected to the impersonal manner in which Mendicity supporters treated him and their suspicion of him. He complained that they spoke with him only to 'threate[n]' him 'with offers of putting [him] into blind asylums, and all sorts of affronts.[41] Hecksey considered himself a useful fixture of Westminster life, a source of amusement and of parliamentary gossip for those who gave him money. Ticket distributors denied him the respect which he felt he had earned through years in the community. He resented the Mendicity Society's attempts to banish him to an institution where he would be deprived of the public recognition he felt he deserved. The Mendicity Society's 'charity' — impersonal, ungenerous, and forced on recipients— did not accord with Hecksey's definition of the term.

To many beggars, the Mendicity Office at Red Lion Square was as intolerable as the people who handed out Mendicity tickets on the streets. The Mendicity Society believed that beggars who avoided the office did not do so out of concern for their privacy. The charity insisted that beggars who demanded alms from strangers in public felt no disgrace in approaching a charitable organisation. However, as Lynn MacKay argues, many beggars felt such shame that they sought to hide their impoverished situation from friends and neighbours.[42] Applying at Red Lion Square was a public

[39] *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1840, pp. 325-28.
[40] Ibid., p. 328.
[41] Ibid., p. 327.
[42] MacKay, 'Mendicity Society', p. 59.

affair. Beggars queued outside the building in full view of passersby and Mendicity clerks penetrated beggars' personal networks while fact-checking. MacKay suggests that beggars disliked the Mendicity Office because its investigations compromised their respectability and, by extension, their financial security:

> In an environment where reputation in the neighbourhood was very important, and begging an activity to be concealed as much as possible, the Mendicity Society practice of home visits by strangers […] would have excited comment by the neighbours. Similarly, appeals to 'creditable persons' in the neighbourhood —including landlords and shopkeepers— also helped broadcast the individual's plight, as did Society officers redeeming goods from the local pawn shop. These Society practices made the individual's indigence public knowledge, and subsequently made it difficult to maintain financial independence.[43]

Their reputations tarnished by the Mendicity Society, beggars had difficulty convincing landlords, pawnbrokers, and shopkeepers to extend them credit or deal with them.

MacKay grounds her argument in working-class respectability, but she does not suggest that respectability was anything other than a tool for securing material advantage. However, for some beggars, the Mendicity Office was as much an affront to their dignity as to their income. Going to Red Lion Square could be a degrading experience, particularly for those who prided themselves on their respectability, as John James Bezer did. Bezer was a literate man who held a succession of jobs that placed him in the upper reaches of the working class. In 1838 Bezer's fortunes changed when he lost his job and he turned to begging to feed his young family. After eight days singing hymns for alms, Bezer applied at the Mendicity Office, an experience he later described in his autobiography. Bezer told how he was made to stand behind a bar 'like a criminal' while the charity managers interrogated him.[44] The officers accused him of being a confirmed imposter, although Bezer swore that he had begged for only a short time. The charity offered bread and cheese to Bezer, but insisted that it had to be consumed on site so that it could not be sold on.[45] Bezer refused to obey the order because he wanted to share the food with his family. He called the Chairman a 'devil with no natural feelings'

[43] Ibid.
[44] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, p. 382.
[45] *The Monthly Review*, August 1820, p. 420.

and ran off with his meal.[46] Bezer objected as much to the spirit with which the Mendicity Society treated him as to its paltry relief.

Bezer shared the Mendicity governors' view that begging destroyed self-respect and independent habits.[47] Yet, if Bezer believed that begging rendered the poor dependent, he was convinced that the Mendicity Society only deepened degradation with its demeaning policies. The foulmouthed beggars Bezer met at Red Lion Square seemed to him more like animals than humans.[48] Bezer contrasted the Mendicity Society's dehumanising 'charity' with the charitableness of his landlord. When the landlord learned of Bezer's unemployment, he commiserated and told Bezer that he could pay his rent when he found work.[49] The landlord's charity strengthened economic agency, for it neither allowed Bezer to avoid his financial obligations, nor did it punish him for circumstances that were beyond his control.

In her study of Welsh charity schools, Sarah Lloyd argues that multiple theories of charity circulated in eighteenth-century London. Benefactors and beneficiaries frequently conceived of charity in very different ways, occasionally resulting in conflict.[50] Beggars and the governors of the Mendicity Society also disagreed about the nature of charity. This conflict was not simply about material resources; it was also about the rights and obligations of givers and receivers —a 'moral economy' of charity. Bezer was at pains to make this point. Reflecting on his decision to become a Chartist in the wake of his encounter with the Mendicity Society, he acknowledged that politics was 'a bread-and-cheese question' for him. However, he declared that satisfying his basic physical needs was not his sole motivation, for he 'ever loved the idea of freedom […] and not only for what it will

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[46] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, p. 382.
[47] Bezer related how the shame of begging had initially been 'agony' to him. However, he became increasingly inured to begging and '*bolder* every day'. He even toyed with the notion that he 'could live much more comfortably by begging than by hard work'. *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 29 November 1851, p. 349.
[48] Bezer described the beggars at the Mendicity Office as 'hardened, brutal-looking creatures' who 'munch[ed], like so many dogs, hunks of bread and cheese'. *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, pp. 381, 382.
[49] Ibid., p. 383.
[50] Sarah Lloyd, '"Agents in Their Own Concerns?": Charity and the Economy of Makeshifts in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 100-36 (p. 130).

fetch, but the *holy principle*'.[51] Lloyd argues that historians do not do justice to poor actors in the past by 'reduc[ing] them to a set of objects in search of objects'.[52] Historians risk replicating the Mendicity Society's stereotype of the grasping beggar if they characterise agency solely as the pursuit of goods.

The Mendicity Society anti-almsgiving campaign relied on members of the public to act as its agents. If the campaign were to be successful, would-be almsgivers had to refrain from giving anything to beggars or substitute Mendicity tickets for cash handouts. The Mendicity Society attempted to ensure that no Londoner could plead ignorance as an excuse for giving alms. In its reports and newspaper advertisements, the society urged readers to use tickets. It also paid men to carry placards proclaiming 'Give no money to beggars' about the streets and Mendicity supporters occasionally intervened when they witnessed people giving alms.[53] Despite its prevalence, the charity's propaganda failed to convince large segments of the population. Just as beggars had a different conception of charity from Mendicity governors, so too did almsgivers. People of all classes countered the charity's arguments against almsgiving. They bolstered the agency of the poor by creating rhetorical space for beggars to continue to ask for alms.

The Mendicity Society justified its anti-almsgiving stance with statistical claims. It asserted that the vast majority of beggars were imposters or sturdy beggars. The society argued that, while almsgivers might happen upon a worthy beggar on the streets, there was a much greater likelihood that they would encounter unworthy mendicants. The Mendicity governors reasoned that any good almsgivers did in relieving true distress was far outweighed by the harm done in rewarding idleness and imposture. Applying Bentham's principle of utility, the governors concluded that withholding alms produced the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'. They advised the public to regard beggars with emotional detachment, so that beggars' heartrending 'impositions' could not distract them from a level-headed consideration of the facts.

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[51] The emphasis is in the original text. *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, p. 383.
[52] Lloyd, '"Agents in Their Own Concerns?"', p. 130.
[53] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, p. 381; *The Morning Post*, 15 December 1832.

Far from viewing beggars as faceless statistics, many Londoners came to know beggars as individual characters. Mendicants were frequently found at the same location day after day. For the public who encountered these beggars on a regular basis, familiarity did not necessarily breed contempt. Indeed, Vic Gatrell claims that many Londoners developed a 'backhanded affection' for beggars.[54] People might refuse to treat *their* beggars with the emotional detachment advised by the Mendicity Society. Lord Maryborough, brother to the Duke of Wellington, certainly felt the Mendicity rhetoric was irrelevant to his relationship with the blind beggar Eleanor Goodall. In 1826 Maryborough claimed to have known Goodall for twenty years. He regularly supplied her with food and clothing.[55] Lord Maryborough may have considered the pavement outside his house as his jurisdiction, for he allowed Goodall to sit there and defended her when Mendicity officers sought to remove her. He insisted that the charity was wrong to portray Goodall as an 'idle and disorderly' nuisance.[56] After all, he found her so inoffensive that he actively encouraged her presence outside his mansion. Maryborough's Tory paternalism clashed with Mendicity Society policies that had been shaped by the Whiggish interests of bankers and businessmen.[57]

The public encountered begging personalities in print as well as in the streets. The Mendicity Society's anti-almsgiving rhetoric competed against a body of early nineteenth-century literature that invited readers to view beggars with curiosity rather than suspicious detachment. The aristocratic protagonists of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* books meet a host of colourful beggars while exploring the dens of the metropolis.[58] John Thomas Smith's *Vagabondia* features portraits of famous mendicants.[59] These works allude to beggars' raucous pastimes and tricks, but they are not entirely condemnatory. Gatrell argues that *Life in London* 'tacitly resist[s]' antibegging rhetoric by 'vigorously

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[54] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic, 2006), p. 564.
[55] *The Morning Post*, 24 August 1826.
[56] Ibid.
[57] The beggar Job Hecksey evidently believed that charitable practices divided along political lines. He claimed that the Reform Act of 1832 marked the first intrusion of Mendicity Society onto his Westminster begging pitch, as middle-class MPs (whom Hecksey called 'priggish upstarts') increasingly supplanted 'rale born gemmen [gentlemen]'. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1840, p. 327.
[58] Pierce Egan, *Life in London; or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and His Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom, Accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in Their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1821); Pierce Egan, *Pierce Egan's Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry, and Logic, in Their Pursuits through Life in and out of London* (London: C. Baynes, 1830).
[59] John Thomas Smith, *Vagabondia; or, Anecdotes of Mendicant Wanderers through the Streets of London; with Portraits of the Most Remarkable, Drawn from the Life* (London: [n. pub.], 1817).

celebrat[ing] low-life vitality'.[60] Authors challenged the Mendicity Society's statistical arguments by focusing on individuals, rather than the supposed mass of imposters. James Caulfield included Samuel Horsey, a man with no legs who travelled about London on a sledge, in his *Lives and Portraits of Remarkable Characters* (Fig. 6).[61] Caulfield quoted a source that stated that most beggars in London were imposters and unworthy of relief, a claim the Mendicity Society espoused. However, Caulfield suggested that Horsey was no imposter. Indeed, his upstanding character and disabilities marked him out as a worthy beggar. To Caulfield, Horsey was a hapless victim of circumstances rather than an aggressor as the Mendicity Society would have him. Caulfield observed that Horsey was 'worthy of the commiseration and compassion of the public', even if rumours that he lived lavishly were true.[62] Caulfield was well aware of the Mendicity Society's rhetoric, yet he allowed his own personal judgment to override it. By representing beggars as individuals who each had their own unique stories to tell, writers encouraged readers to assess each case independently, instead of applying the Mendicity Society's rhetoric indiscriminately to all mendicants.

[60] Gatrell, p. 559.
[61] [James Caulfield], *The Lives and Portraits of Remarkable Characters, Drawn from the Most Authentic Sources*, 2 vols (London: W. Lewis, 1819), I, pp. 160-62.
[62] Ibid., p. 162.

Fig. 6 A sympathetic portrait of the beggar Samuel Horsey, from James Caulfield's *The Lives and Portraits of Remarkable Characters* (1819)

Charles Lamb also came to Horsey's defence. When the Mendicity Society arrested Horsey in 1821 and a magistrate committed him to a house of correction, Lamb alleged that Horsey had been 'slandered' with an 'exaggeration of nocturnal orgies'.[63] Like many critics of the Mendicity Society, Lamb believed that the charity supplied false information to the public. The Mendicity Society boasted about the number of beggars it exposed as beggars, but it was vague about how it obtained its figures. It regularly branded mendicants as imposters or sturdy beggars, yet seldom explained how it had reached these conclusions. A scandal in 1821 trained attention on the charity's secretive ways. In this year, *The Times* suspected Thomas Bodkin of attempting to sway public opinion during the Queen Caroline affair.[64] *The Times* claimed that, when it requested clarification from the Mendicity

[63] The Mendicity Society argued that Horsey lived in 'constant riot and profligacy' and rumours circulated that Horsey caroused drunkenly with his fellow beggars each night. *John Bull*, 25 October 1821; *The London Magazine*, June 1822, p. 535.

[64] At the height of the Queen Caroline affair in 1821, a person identifying himself as 'W.T.', 'a real but not an Ultra loyalist', wrote to *The Times* and named ultra loyalists who, the writer alleged, had supplied people to applaud the King at the theatre. The writer claimed that the ultra loyalists had 'concocted' their 'scheme' at the Mendicity Office. *The Times* believed that Thomas Bodkin had forged the letter. *The Times*, 28 July 1821.

Society about Bodkin's involvement, it met with evasiveness and denials. Could the Mendicity Society be trusted to investigate beggars fairly when it had been slow to scrutinise Bodkin's political actions and unwilling to communicate openly with *The Times*? *The Times* suggested that Bodkin — whom it clearly considered a liar— was incapable of conducting the society is a disinterested way.[65] The newspaper claimed that it already had evidence that Bodkin manipulated information. For years, Bodkin had been placing notices in *The Times* describing the society's prosecution of beggars in glowing terms. The notices were effectively advertisements for the charity that masqueraded as police reports.[66] During the 1821 scandal *The Times* remarked that it had been 'grievously gulled' by the 'puffs' Bodkin had placed in its pages and it vowed to present a more accurate picture of the charity's activities in future.[67] The damage to the Mendicity Society's reputation was compounded in 1824 when *The Times* accused the charity of lying to subscribers about how it used their subscriptions.

Bezer evidently believed that the Mendicity Society's public façade concealed inner corruption. The society's placards promised work and clothing for beggars, yet Bezer received nothing but a miserly portion of food and false accusations. To Bezer, Mendicity officials were as deceitful as the imposters they claimed to suppress.[68] Bezer argued that investigation was a necessary part of charitable giving.[69] However, he maintained that inquiries ought not to be conducted behind closed doors, beyond public scrutiny.[70] Almsgivers could establish the deservingness of beggars openly on the streets, by asking questions of beggars and observing their behaviour. Bezer reflected a broader Chartist criticism of the Mendicity Society as a secretive private agency that operated outside the bounds of the law.[71]

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[65] *The Times*, 28 July 1821; *The Times*, 1 August, 1821.
[66] The notices imitated the style and layout of journalists' reports on the magistrate courts; however, the notices' excessive praise of the Mendicity Society and their subtle spatial segregation from 'Police' columns identify them as Bodkin's contributions. The notices often followed directly after the police reports, so that an unwary reader might assume that they had been written by the newspaper. See examples in *The Times*, 14 July 1819; *The Times*, 2 September 1819; *The Times*, 21 October 1819.
[67] *The Times*, 25 July 1821.
[68] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, p. 382.
[69] Bezer criticised a lady's poor judgment in giving him half a crown in alms, for she had not first asked him questions to establish if he were an impostor or not. *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 29 November 1851, p. 350.
[70] Ibid., p. 350.
[71] This sentiment can be found the *Black Dwarf*, an unstamped newspaper that opposed the Gagging Acts. In a letter to this paper, 'Humanitus' stated that the Mendicity Society's begging-letter investigations 'open[ed] a dark and endless field of deception, for the exercise of cunning and cupidity, without the possibility of

Many commentators doubted the Mendicity Society's assertion that imposters outnumbered worthy beggars and argued that the reverse was true: that most beggars were in legitimate need. Taking this as their premise, they inverted the charity's utilitarian argument and asserted that the good of assisting the mass of deserving beggars was worth the small harm of encouraging a small number of imposters. They added that the potential consequences of denying relief —extreme physical suffering or even starvation— were far worse than the potential harms of giving aid. In financial terms, too, personal almsgiving was the best choice, for individuals could identify and relieve distress for far less money than the Mendicity Society could, with its costly administrative machinery.[72] The army officer John Fox Burgoyne described what happened when he and a friend encountered a beggar:

> My companion would have checked my liberality, by his caution, 'Never to give to beggars in the streets, they are all so by profession, or, they are imposters'. I remarked, that if this were the case, they were the best actors I had ever met with. I have frequently been assured that the Mendicity Society is the legitimate channel of relief for the poor; but I have rarely found that those who profess *on principle*, to reject their claims on the street, are more disposed to attend to them elsewhere […] I must contribute towards the relief of these poor creatures, even at the risk of occasionally encouraging an unworthy object.[73]

Burgoyne relieved the beggar because he was deeply sceptical of the assertion that imposture was pervasive and that the charity would relieve worthy individuals in private. Although Burgoyne referred to the Mendicity Association in Dublin, similar opinions appeared in London contexts.[74] A

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detection'. *The Black Dwarf*, 21 December 1821, p. 958. See also the anonymous work, *The Mendicity Society Unmasked, in a Letter to the Managers, Wherein Is Shown the Real Character of the Pretended Benevolent Society, as Developed in the Proceedings of Its Begging Letter Committee* (London: W.C. Wright, 1825).

[72] Criticising the Mendicity Society's expenditure in 1826, *The Times* observed that 'herein […] consists the absurdity of the Society —that in its utmost pretensions it only affects to rescue men from an evil [i.e. almsgiving] from which every man may rescue himself, and to which no man is under the slightest necessity of committing'. *The Times*, 31 March 1826. For a similar argument see [Elizabeth Heyrick], *Observations on the Offensive and Injurious Effect of Corporal Punishment; on the Unequal Administration of Penal Justice; and on the Pre-Eminent Advantages of the Mild and Reformatory over the Vindictive System of Punishment* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1827), p. 4.

[73] [John Fox Burgoyne], *Ireland in 1831. Letters on the State of Ireland* (London: T. Brettell, 1831), p. 6.

[74] The Mendicity Institution in Dublin was established in 1818. Like the Mendicity Society in London, the Dublin organisation was anti-almsgiving. For more information see Audrey Woods, *Dublin Outsiders: A History of the Mendicity Institution, 1818-1998* (Dublin: A. & A. Farmar, 1998).

range of people voiced utilitarian arguments in favour of almsgiving, including Chartists, philanthropists, and authors.[75]

Utilitarian arguments for almsgiving were often interwoven with claims about Christian obligations towards the poor. In 1837 a letter from 'Vigilans' appeared in *The Sunday Times*, a paper founded by Daniel Whittle Harvey, a radical politician. Vigilans observed:

> I think of the slow wasting of hunger, and the fear of death, and I conclude, that, both in a Christian and human sense, it is infinitely the less evil of the two to 'give'! You may occasionally confer a guerdon on an imposter. On the other hand, you may be accessory to the perishing of a real object![76]

Vigilans proceeded on to insist that the distress and gratitude shown by beggars could not easily be feigned. He argued that the 'dull strong-hearted "political economist"' lacked Christian feeling.[77] The radical Quaker philanthropist Elizabeth Heyrick also claimed that it was cruel to withhold alms; the Bible taught that beggars had a right to ask for charity and that Christians were duty-bound to relieve suffering.[78] Although by no means a radical, the barrister Samuel Richard Bosanquet held a similar opinion. In *The Rights of the Poor and Christian Almsgiving Vindicated*, he advocated for a return to a Christian charity in which people 'give and ask no questions'.[79] For philanthropists like Heyrick and Bosanquet, the sympathetic and personal charity of the district visiting societies was preferable to the harsh discrimination of the Mendicity Society.[80]

The Mendicity Society was disappointed that almsgivers did not universally embrace its model of charity. Indeed, the society proved unable even to unite the wealthy under its anti-

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[75] Tom Dashall, one of the protagonists in *Real Life in London*, almost falls victim to an imposter. When a Mendicity constable suggests that Dashall is naïve, Dashall responds: 'I confess […] that in the present instance I have been egregiously deceived […] yet I would not wish to prove callous to the claim of distress, even if sometimes unguardedly bestowing the mite of benevolence on an undeserving object'. *Real Life in London* was an imitator of Pierce Egan's *Life in London*. *Real Life in London; or, The Further Rambles and Adventures of Bob Tallyho, Esq. and His Cousin, the Hon. Tom Dashall, &c. through the Metropolis* (London: Jones, 1821), p. 284.

[76] *The Sunday Times*, 19 February 1837.

[77] Ibid.

[78] [Heyrick], *Observations*, pp. 4, 11-12; [Elizabeth Heyrick], *Protest against the Spirit and Practice of Modern Legislation, as Exhibited in the New Vagrant Act* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1824), pp. 20, 29.

[79] Charles Lamb was also in favour of giving alms without inquiring into beggars' circumstances. S.R. Bosanquet, *The Rights of the Poor and Christian Almsgiving Vindicated; or, The State and Character of the Poor and the Conduct and Duties of the Rich, Exhibited and Illustrated* (London: James Burns, 1841), p. 356; *The London Magazine*, June 1822, p. 536.

[80] Bosanquet referred to district visiting as 'that most successful and wonder-working system, —which humanises and conciliates the poorer classes; elevates, encourages, stimulates the poor man'. S.R. Bosanquet, p. 373.

almsgiving banner. The pro-almsgiving John Fox Burgoyne and Samuel Richard Bosanquet both had relatives who sat on the board of the Mendicity Society.[81] By challenging the Mendicity Society's anti-almsgiving rhetoric, citizens bolstered the agency of the poor, enabling them to continue to earn money on the streets. As Christopher Ferguson demonstrates, opposition to anti-almsgiving sentiments persisted into the mid-Victorian period and large segments of the population refused to heed the Mendicity Society's advice.[82] Even though the Mendicity Society had been in operation for twenty years by the time John Bezer became a beggar, many people were nonetheless willing to relieve him. A lady gave him a half-crown. Bezer also claimed that people of his own class were generous; a 'poor old woman' pressed him to take a farthing and Bezer noted that an old acquaintance he ran into on the streets would have assisted him had he made the man aware of his situation.[83] Although working-class people seldom recorded their own views on almsgiving, they seem to have regularly given money to beggars, perhaps because they were well knew that there was a fine line between getting by and destitution.[84] During eight days of begging, Bezer did not receive a Mendicity ticket and he only learned about the Mendicity Society when he happened upon one of the charity's placard-bearers.[85] Clearly, the Mendicity Society had not succeeded in extinguishing beggars' ability to make shift by begging on the streets of the metropolis.

Agency and Industry

The governors of the Mendicity Society argued that, in most cases, begging was the product of moral failing —a love of idleness and dependency— rather than of economic circumstances. The

[81] John Fox Burgoyne came from the same family as Montagu Burgoyne, who expressed support for the Mendicity Society. Samuel Richard Bosanquet's father, Samuel Bosanquet, was Bodkin's successor as secretary of the Mendicity Society.
[82] Christopher Ferguson, 'The Political Economy of the Street and Its Discontents: Beggars and Pedestrians in Mid-Nineteenth-Century London', *Cultural and Social History*, 12 (2015), 27-50.
[83] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 29 November 1851, p. 349,
[84] In the mid-nineteenth century a beggar told Henry Mayhew that workmen's wives were his most generous almsgivers: 'Tradesmen that aint over well off have a fellow feeling; but the workmen's wives […] they looks at me, and says, "Poor man!" and drops the coppers […] into my hand'. Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor; A Cyclopædia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, 4 vols (London: Griffin and Bohn, 1861-62), IV (1862), p. 430. See also S.R. Bosanquet, p. 169.
[85] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 13 December 1851, p. 381.

charity claimed that most beggars had the option of honest employment, but chose to follow the lucrative profession of begging instead. The Mendicity Society's ideas about work proved as controversial as its anti-almsgiving rhetoric. Beggars frequently complained that the Mendicity Society misrepresented their characters and did not understand their economic situation. When Mendicity officers arrested three silk weavers and brought them before the Lambeth Street magistrate, the men stated that 'it was only to prevent their wives and children from absolutely perishing by starvation, that they had recourse to the degrading alternative of begging'.[86] Similarly, John Bezer claimed that he took up begging only after he had exhausted all honest means of providing for his family.[87] Beggars argued that they were victims of economic circumstances that were beyond their control. They insisted that, contrary to the society's claims, begging was not a free choice, but a desperate last resort. Beggars emphasised that they had very little agency.

The Mendicity Society's approach to material relief was informed by its conviction that the begging population was generally idle. The Mendicity Society gave assistance in the form of clothing, lodgings, and tools.[88] However, the charity believed only a small minority of beggars were worthy of such relief. Most mendicants who applied at Red Lion Square received only bread or soup from the society's kitchen while the clerks investigated their cases. In keeping with its scientific approach to relief, the charity carefully weighed out each portion of food. According to the charity, a standard serving of 'ten ounces of bread and one pint of soup, or ¼ lb. of cheese' was sufficient to satisfy hunger, but not so generous as to encourage dependence.[89] The food on offer at the Mendicity Office did not impress many beggars. In part, this was because it was a poor addition to their economy of makeshifts. While soup charities in London were 'very anxious to œconomize the *time* of the poor', the Mendicity Society obliged beggars to queue outside for hours and undergo an interview before they received their dole.[90] Beggars may have considered a pint of soup a poor reward for half a day's

[86] *The London Standard*, 10 April, 1829.
[87] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 22 November 1851, p. 334.
[88] The charity also paid transportation costs to allow beggars to return to their native communities.
[89] [C.R. Lushington], *The Practice of the Mendicity Society. By 'One Who Knows It Well'* (London: J. Murray, 1847), p. 14.
[90] The Spitalfields Soup Society designed its facilities so that clients spent an average of only thirty-eight minutes within the Soup House. Unlike the Mendicity Society, it allowed clients to collect soup on behalf of family members, thus minimising disturbance to daily routines. *The Philanthropist; or, Repository for Hints and*

effort. They complained of the thinness of the soup, claiming it could not sustain them. One African man reportedly declared that 'he could not live on soup for ever' when he refused a Mendicity ticket.[91]

Poor people not only assessed the value of soup as a material resource, they also vested soup with broader symbolic meaning. Beggars expressed their agency in political terms as well as in terms of survival. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, political economists championed soup as the ideal food for the poor, praising it as nourishing and economical.[92] Whereas philanthropists viewed soup as a miracle food, others considered soup a symbol of the Mendicity Society's cruel response to poverty. Soup represented oppression to many radical writers. William Cobbett considered soup to be the food of miserable French peasants, while roast beef was the preserve of free born Englishmen.[93] Cobbett argued that 'soup shop philanthropists' offered the 'pretended charity' of soup so that they could avoid addressing the fundamental inequalities that perpetuated impoverishment.[94] Soup featured prominently in radical attacks on the Mendicity Society during the 1830s. *The Penny Satirist* paper lampooned public figures and advocated for working-class rights. In 1837 it published a cartoon depicting aldermen heaving up the contents of their stomachs on the morning after the Lord Mayor's Day feast (Fig. 7). One alderman, convinced that his vomit contains undigested nutrients, suggests that the Mendicity Society serve it as soup.[95] The cartoon highlights the hypocrisy of political economists who starve the poor for the sake of economy, but whose own lives are marked by grotesque overconsumption. Money that might have relieved the

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Suggestions Calculated to Promote the Comfort and Happiness of Man, 7 vols (London: Richard Taylor, 1811-19), II (1812) p. 182.

[91] Montagu Burgoyne, p. 43.

[92] Since soup simmered for hours, the toughest and cheapest cuts of meat could be used in it. Meat could be stretched when combined in a soup with less expensive vegetables and broth. Soup was not as wasteful as roasting joints, for it retained meat juices, rather than allowing them to run off. It could also be easily produced in large batches, an important consideration for charities with a large clientele. For more on soup see David Filtness, 'Poverty, Savings Banks and the Development of Self-Help' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2013), pp. 74-76; Sandra Sherman, *Imagining Poverty: Quantification and the Decline of Paternalism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), pp. 177-215.

[93] William Cobbett, *Selections from Cobbett's Political Works: Being a Complete Abridgment of the 100 Volumes Which Comprise the Writings of* Porcupine *and the* Weekly Political Register, ed. by John M. Cobbett and James P. Cobbett, 6 vols (London: Anne Cobbett, 1835-37), V (1835), pp. 244, 312.

[94] Ibid., p. 31; William Cobbett, *Letters to the Right Honourable Lord Hawkesbury, and to the Right Honourable Henry Addington, on the Peace with Buonaparté*, 2nd edn (London: Cobbett and Morgan, 1802), p. 20.

[95] *The Penny Satirist*, 18 November 1837.

hunger of the poor instead satisfied the gluttony of the rich. Echoes of radicals' soup-based arguments can be found among beggars. The poor referred to the charity's soup as 'bone gruel' and 'bone water', implying that the charity's relief was cruelly inadequate.[96] Paupers used similar terminology to disparage the fare on offer within New Poor Law workhouses.[97] The Mendicity Office was known among beggars as the 'soup-quarters' or 'soup house'.[98] By recognising only the charity's soup-distributing function, the slang suggested that the Mendicity Society offered no more than superficial support to beggars.

SICK ALDERMEN, THE MORNING AFTER LORD MAYOR'S DAY.

[THE "DRAWING"-ROOM SCENE.]

DOCTOR DRAUGHT.—Not a bit the worse, only a little wrinkled about the stomach; but that won't be perceived. You must wear your girdle also pretty tight for a few days, and a little padding in addition will make up for the loss of caloric which the exhausted stomach will experience for some time.

ALDERMAN TURTLESOUP.—Oh, I shall soon fill it again, but (sighing) when! oh, when shall I fill it with such delicious fare, and such a glorious guest?!!

ALDERMAN WINEPIPE.—For heaven's sake be quick! Don't you perceive that whilst you are getting ease and comfort, I am ready to burst with my contents! My stomach is fermenting like a mash-tub, my wine-press is ready to burst! for mercy's sake! haste! doctor, haste! the small still is running vehemently, but gives no relief. There is more in the tub than the worm can carry off.

ALDERMAN SIPSOP.—Patience! brother, patience! There is no danger, I had the same sensations before my lying in, but I have had a safe delivery and a good getting up, and this *caudle* that the doctor has given me, I perceive, will set me to rights in an hour or two. What a noble invention a stomach pump is! a steam engine is a mere bauble in comparison? Brother Slop here, I see, is doctoring himself, but I don't like that way of it. I can't bear the labour pains. The pump saves all these, and I have been trying hard to persuade my wife to use it on Anti-malthusian occasions.

ALDERMAN TURTLE SOUP.—Good, excellent, never thought of that before.

ALDERMAN WINEPIPE.—For mercy's sake, be quick, doctor.

ALDERMAN HICCUP.—Oh! hee-oo—hee-oo—oh-hee-oo, what a deuce of a head-ache I have got—these city feasts are all vanity and vexation of spirit; I don't think I, hee-oo hee-oo, shall ever, hee-oo, go, hee-oo, to another.

ALDERMAN SIPSOP.—Ha! ha! brother hiccup, I had the same sensations before my delivery! I vowed and protested I should never go to another! but no sooner was the pressure removed than reason resumed its sovereignty. Patience, brother, patience!

ALDERMAN TURTLESOUP.—How long does it take to extract the nourishment from the food, Doctor?

DOCTOR.—Twelve or fourteen, sometimes twenty-four hours.

ALDERMAN TURTLESOUP.—Oh, indeed! then it is quite good yet, Doctor! It might be sent to the "Mendicity Society." It is only second hand, I send my old clothes there.

Fig. 7 A satirical cartoon from *The Penny Satirist* (18 November 1837)

[96] James Grant, *Sketches in London* (London: W.S. Orr, 1838), p. 8; *The Examiner*, 7 December 1834.
[97] *The London Dispatch and People's Political and Social Reformer*, 1 October 1836.
[98] *The Morning Chronicle*, 17 February 1829; *The Examiner*, 7 December 1834.

Radical critics of the Mendicity Society insisted that working class people did not wish to rely on charity, but that the institution did not offer them the stable employment that they required to make an independent living. The Mendicity Society, however, argued that most beggars were workshy and would not take up honest labour given the opportunity. When interviewing beggars, Mendicity clerks asked each person what had caused them to become beggars. The charity supplied statistics of beggars' 'alleged' causes of distress in its annual reports. Unemployment was the most common explanation for begging, with half of the charity's clients complaining of want of work, 'real or pretended'.[99] As the wording of the reports conveys, Mendicity officials believed that many beggars merely claimed to have no work to justify their begging. They argued that there were plenty of jobs to go around, yet beggars were too idle to do them. In 1821 the society agree to supply labourers for Thorrington and Roberts' stone wharf on Regent's Canal. The Mendicity Society claimed that this work programme would identify which beggars were truly willing to labour for a living and which merely pretended to want work. Most of the men whom the Mendicity Society referred to Thorrington and Roberts' failed to present themselves for work. The few who did go to the wharf did not remain there for long. In 1822 the society reported that 196 (seventy-six percent) of the 257 men who had accepted jobs as stonebreakers absconded.[100] The Mendicity Society took these statistics as proof that beggars preferred begging to honest labour.

MacKay argues that the society's interpretation of high absconding rates was mistaken. She suggests that beggars deserted the stone-breaking wharf because the work was a financial liability, not because they were shiftless.[101] Bodkin explained that the Mendicity Society was 'not justified in giving a full rate of wages' as an institution that was funded by public subscription.[102] Beggars were paid a piece rate. The fittest workers earned eighteen pence in a day, but many others managed only six pence.[103] Men on the lower end of the pay scale or who had families to support likely struggled to

[99] In 1819, 1568 (forty-eight percent) of the 3284 beggars the society interviewed claimed that their distress was due to unemployment. *The First Report of the Society Established in London for the Suppression of Mendicity* (London: Bensley and Son, 1819), p. 15.
[100] *Fourth Report*, p. 13.
[101] MacKay, 'Mendicity Society', p. 60.
[102] HCPP, Select Committee on Emigration from United Kingdom, 1826 (404), IV.1, p. 214.
[103] Ibid.

make ends meet on the society's wage. Although no administrative records survive from the Mendicity Society to shed light on Mendicity clients' experiences of stone-breaking, the minute books of the Refuge for the Destitute, a charity that had a similar work scheme, provide some insight.[104] Refuge workers complained of their paltry earnings. Richard Evans informed the Refuge governors that he had earned only seventeen pence in three days '& that he [could not] obtain employment of any kind, whereby he [could] obtain subsistence'.[105] The Refuge supplemented the pay of fifty-six year-old James Wilson when he received a mere two shillings for a week's labour.[106] Several men were physically incapable of performing the backbreaking toil.[107] As MacKay explains, it made good financial sense for men to leave such poor employment and go in search of better opportunities.[108] In the 1830s, the society introduced further work schemes, including oakum picking for women. Like the stone-breaking, these schemes proved unpopular among beggars.[109]

Poor people disliked the Mendicity Society's work programmes because they did not fit well into their economy of makeshifts. However, they also objected to the work because, like the soup, it represented the charity's uncharitable attitude towards poverty. During the 1830s radical writers likened the charity's work schemes to those of the New Poor Law. A correspondent to *The Sunday Times* argued that the Mendicity Society was as bad as the poor law commissioners for forcing women to perform the 'unhealthy' and 'wretched' task of picking oakum.[110] As oakum-picking did not require great financial investment to initiate and was unskilled work, it was performed not only in workhouses, but in prisons. Picking oakum generated very little profit (and prisoners received no share of this), yet prison authorities valued it as a means to prevent idleness and stop prisoners from occupying themselves in insalubrious pursuits. To the inmates who spent hours each day picking

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[104] The Refuge for the Destitute (not to be confused with the Refuge for the Houseless) was a charitable reformatory established in 1804. By the 1820s the Refuge catered primarily to juvenile delinquents. However, impoverished adult men and women, including beggars, occasionally applied at the charity for relief. In 1823 the Refuge copied the Mendicity Society's work programme to assist destitute men who did not qualify for admittance into the institution. HCPP, Royal Commission of Inquiry into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws, 1834 (44), p. 150.
[105] HA, Refuge for the Destitute, minute book of the Male Refuge, D/S/4/24, 19 November 1825.
[106] HA, Refuge for the Destitute, minute book of the Male Refuge, D/S/4/24, 7 October 1825.
[107] HA, Refuge for the Destitute, minute book of the Male Refuge, D/S/4/24, 14 February 1824, 24 December 1824, 18 February 1825.
[108] MacKay, 'Mendicity Society', p. 60.
[109] [Lushington], p. 15; HCPP, Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, 1837-38 (578), XV.321, p. 92.
[110] *The Sunday Times*, 16 April 1837.

pounds of oakum, such a mind- and finger-numbing task must have seemed more like cruel punishment than an improving occupation. Radicals likened the Mendicity Society's work to prison toil. An editorial in *The Sunday Times* described the society's work programme as 'a species of treadwheel labour', implying that it was as vicious as the infamous prison punishment, breaking poor people's bodies and their spirits.[111] Radicals portrayed the charity as a 'bastile-workhouse [sic]' that ignored the rights of the poor.[112] Far from enabling the poor to pursue independent self-sufficient lives, the Mendicity Society merely deepened their demoralisation until they were 'more like dogs than human beings'.[113]

Beggars voiced similar arguments as radicals advanced in their publications. In 1834 William Hines was tried for assaulting a Mendicity officer. The prosecution claimed that Hines had disregarded the officer's command that he go to Red Lion Square because, as Hines had informed the officer, the Mendicity Society 'want me to vork [sic] for my vittles, and I'm blowed if I stand that nonsense'.[114] This statement seemed to uphold the stereotype of the sturdy beggar. However, Hines suggested in court that he found the nature of the Mendicity Society's work intolerable, not the concept of work itself. He noted that Mendicity officials 'work a man for six or eight hours a day as hard as a horse, and then […] give him a pennorth of bread and a cup of what they call soup but I calls bone-water'.[115] Employing the same language that Chartist writers and anti-poor law campaigners used, Hines condemned the Mendicity Society as exploitative. He appeared to believe that it was necessary to avoid the Mendicity Society to preserve his dignity and humanity. To Hines, submitting to the Mendicity Society was equivalent to relinquishing his agency.

[111] *The Sunday Times*, 6 May 1838.
[112] *The Sunday Times*, 10 June 1838.
[113] *The Sunday Times*, 6 May 1838.
[114] *The Morning Chronicle*, 3 December 1834.
[115] Ibid.

Fig. 8 A caricature from Thomas Hood's *New Comic Annual* (1836) commenting on the Mendicity Society's attitude towards poverty and work. Thomas Bodkin, the Secretary of the Mendicity Society — represented as a 'bodkin' or sturdy needle— stands with his hands fixedly in his pocket, unwilling to help a ragged supplicant.

Despite constantly reiterating the sturdy beggar stereotype, the Mendicity Society admitted that there were some beggars who told the truth when they claimed they could not work. People who were elderly, who had disabilities, or who were ill might be incapable of labouring for their living. The Mendicity Society maintained, however, that debility did not excuse begging. It insisted that disabled people had no need to beg because institutions existed to support them. The Mendicity argued that disabled people ought to be removed from public view and institutionalised, for it considered physical disability to be an aesthetic blight on the streets. The charity apprehended an old sailor who supposedly caused offence by 'thrusting' the stump of his amputated arm 'into people's faces'.[116] Mendicity officials pressured parish authorities to extend relief to aged and disabled beggars. While mendicants generally accepted outdoor relief, they frequently refused to enter workhouses. During its first year of operation, the society placed ninety-two people in workhouses,

[116] *The Champion and Weekly Herald*, 2 October 1836.

but a further 146 rejected this assistance.[117] The charity believed that workhouses could provide long-term refuge to people who were permanently incapacitated. It was therefore frustrated when beggars stayed in the workhouses for only a short period. There were many instances where the Mendicity Society recommended people to workhouses and subsequently apprehended them begging on the streets.

The workhouses may not have met the practical needs of some mendicants. Many beggars preferred the casual night accommodation of the houseless refuges, as these charities did not have complicated admission procedures or insist that inmates surrender their personal belongings.[118] To others, however, the Mendicity Society's workhouse policies denied the poor their rights. In the early 1820s elderly Eleanor Goodall refused the Mendicity Society's offer of a place in the workhouse because she did not wish to be separated from her partner of many years, who was entirely dependent on her. When the charity later apprehended her for begging, her supporter Lord Maryborough condemned the charity for its cruelty in splitting up families and punishing Goodall for her devotion.[119] Referring to the Goodall case, Elizabeth Heyrick criticised the Mendicity Society for depriving the poor of the 'liberty of locomotion' by confining them in workhouses and giving them little alternative to the 'grudging and niggardly doles' of the parish.[120] During the 1830s beggars used anti-poor law rhetoric against the Mendicity Society. One ailing young man refused to follow the charity's recommendation that he re-enter the workhouse because he claimed he had been 'half starved' there on rations that were 'not sufficient for a child'.[121] An old sailor apprehended for begging declared that he could not 'put up with being kept in a sort of cage' at the workhouse 'and fed on water gruel and meat slops, only just sufficient to weather starvation point'.[122] Swearing in anger,

[117] *First Report*, pp. 14-15.
[118] Mendicity supporters during the 1830s and 1840s claimed that the refuges encouraged beggars to move into the capital in search of easy food and lodging. *Essays on the Principles of Charitable Institutions: Being an Attempt to Ascertain What Are the Plans Best Adapted to Improve the Physical and Moral Condition of the Lower Orders in England* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836), pp. 196-97.
[119] *The Morning Post*, 24 August 1826.
[120] [Heyrick], *Observations*, pp. 11-12.
[121] *The Champion and Weekly Herald*, 25 November 1837.
[122] *The London Dispatch and People's Political and Social Reformer*, 1 October 1836.

he railed against the charity for treating him with such brutality after he had spent years fighting the country's battles. The old tar exercised agency in asserting his right to humane treatment.

The Mendicity Society claimed that not all beggars sat on doorsteps with their hands outstretched. Mendicity officials alleged that many mendicants assumed the appearance of traders or artists to avoid the attentions of constables.[123] To the charity, matches, laces, and pencils were mere props for begging. So too were paintings exhibited on the streets and pictures chalked on the pavements. During its first few years in operation, the charity campaigned for changes to vagrancy laws that would enable it to target 'pretend' hawkers and artists. The Vagrancy Act of 1824 gave the charity some of the powers it desired. The act defined beggars as 'every person wandering abroad or placing himself or herself in any public place, street, highway, court, or passage, to beg or gather alms'.[124] Under the act, people could be classed as beggars even if they did not receive alms, or even ask for handouts. Simply being in a position to beg was enough. The vagueness of the definition allowed Mendicity officers to interpret a range of behaviours as begging. Touching one's cap, dropping a courtesy to a passing carriage, or merely resting on the pavements could result in arrest. The act allowed Mendicity constables to characterise the act of carrying small wares or artwork about the streets as begging.

In 1824, soon after the passage of the act, Mendicity officers caught John Cox as he displayed a painting from door to door. Like many men and women arrested in similar circumstances, Cox denied that he was a beggar and insisted that his actions constituted real work. He told the magistrate: '*he thought he had a right to exhibit the product of his own genius*'.[125] He argued that the money he received was part of a transaction, a payment for his 'genius' and not a charitable gift. He maintained that he was a genuine artist who had as much right to earn a living with his skills as any painter of greater means: '*Were not artists exhibiting their own work every day, and encouraged to do so by the first persons in the country, and why should he be singled out for punishment?*'[126] To Cox, exhibiting

[123] *First Report*, p. 20.
[124] HCPP, Bill for More Effectual Suppression of Vagrancy, and Punishment of Idle and Disorderly Persons in England, 1824 (228), III.167.
[125] Cox's words are italicised in the newspaper report. *John Bull*, 26 July 1824.
[126] Ibid.

art on the street was as legitimate as exhibiting in a gallery. Working-class people also challenged the Mendicity Society's labelling of street hawking as begging. In 1834 Mendicity officer John Duffill arrested a poor man who was carrying pencils through the streets and stopped in at a public house on the way to the watch house. On learning the reason for the arrest, a patron of the establishment 'took the man's pencils from him and offered them […] for sale, remarking to [Duffill] that he had better take him into custody too, for he had done no more than what the [man under arrest] had'.[127] Radical writers represented the society's pursuit of street hawkers and artists as a mean-spirited and illegal attempt to restrict the economic opportunities of the poor. They condemned the Vagrancy Act, arguing that its vague definition of begging and vagrancy allowed the Mendicity Society to accuse innocent poor people of offences on the flimsiest of evidence.[128] The charity stated that it promoted the economic agency of the poor. Radicals argued that it did the opposite, punishing people who attempted to support themselves. Non-radicals occasionally voiced similar views. The high Tory *John Bull* condemned the society for confiscating John Cox's paintings and for securing him three months in prison, arguing that these actions pauperised a man who had shown himself capable of earning his own living.[129]

By the early 1830s, the Mendicity Society had turned its attention to street entertainment. To the society, street performance was the antithesis of honest labour, for entertainers contributed little in material terms to the economy. Moreover, entertainers were a 'nuisance'. They occupied the streets, stopping the free flow of traffic, and their obnoxious acts offended the senses and the sensibilities of the public. The charity insisted that, in most cases, street performance was just another pretext for begging. Many entertainers accused the charity of misrepresenting them. In 1835 Mendicity officers arrested John and Thomas Mills, performers who specialised in eating fire and swallowing snakes.

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[127] Patrons of the public house eventually seized the poor man and refused to relinquish him to the Mendicity officer. Duffill then went out in search of assistance, asking a policeman to prevent the poor man from leaving the building. By the time Duffill returned, the poor man, the men who had seized him, and the policeman had all disappeared. Several people who remained in the public house then allegedly assaulted Duffill. The policeman later claimed before the magistrate that he had ignored Duffill's instructions because Duffill 'did not state who he was, or show his authority' and appeared to be drunk. *The Morning Chronicle*, 26 March 1834.
[128] For more on the vagrancy acts see Nicholas Rogers, 'Policing the Poor in Eighteenth-Century London: The Vagrancy Laws and Their Administration', *Histoire-sociale—Social History*, 14 (1991), 121-47; M.J.D. Roberts, 'Public and Private in Early Nineteenth-Century London: The Vagrant Act of 1822 and Its Enforcement', *Social History*, 13 (1988), 273-94.
[129] *John Bull*, 26 July 1824.

Before the magistrate, they refuted the officers' claim that their act was 'disgusting', insisting that it 'always met with the approbation of the public'.[130] The Mills men presented their performance as a commodity for which people were willing to pay. Radical writers defended street entertainers, countering the argument that performing did not qualify as work. When the society arrested the organ grinder Louis Bardini and his monkey, *The Destructive, and Poor Man's Conservative* stated that the pair were not beggars because 'music […] is something for the money' and they 'did more for what they got than many fat, lazy, unproducers do'.[131] To radical writers, the Mendicity Society's suppression of street performance as an unjust attack on working-class taste. They accused the society of hypocrisy for denouncing plebeian entertainments on the street, while tolerating (and even encouraging) similar exhibitions in higher spheres of society. How was it fair for the Mendicity Society to confiscate monkeys from the poor and then donate them to the Zoological Society for the amusement of well-heeled visitors?[132] Poor people and radicals alike exercised agency in asserting their right to seek employment and entertainment on the streets without harassment.

In 1836 the Mendicity Society arrested three glee singers. At the Hatton Garden police court William Martin declared 'he was not aware he was doing wrong by singing in streets' and James Hurd 'boldly' claimed that 'he got his living through his vocal abilities' and was 'merely singing part of a glee, and doing no harm'.[133] The men were sent to the house of correction. Predictably, the radical press was outraged at what it characterised as the criminalisation of poverty.[134] However, non-radical commentators also criticised the handling of the case. Readers wrote in to the leading newspapers to argue that, contrary to the society's claims, street performance was both legal and a real benefit to society. In a letter to *The Morning Chronicle*, an 'old Magistrate' observed that street music was a pleasant diversion that soothed the frayed tempers of his servants.[135] The mainstream newspapers, like

[130] *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 3 May 1835.
[131] *The Destructive, and Poor Man's Conservative*, 22 March 1834.
[132] *The Spectator*, 14 February 1829.
[133] *The Morning Post*, 11 January 1836.
[134] The radical MP John Roebuck argued that far from being a nuisance, street music improved the taste and, by extension, the manners of the poor. J.A. Roebuck, *Radical Support to a Whig Ministry* (London: C & W Reynell, [1836]), pp. 13-15.
[135] The magistrate was likely John Thomas Barber Beaumont who was reported to have intervened in the case. *The Examiner*, 17 January 1836; *The Morning Chronicle*, 18 January 1836.

their radical counterparts, argued that the society's desire for orderly public spaces compromised the freedoms of the poor. In the case of the glee singers, the Mendicity Society's bid to define the limits of economic activity on the streets failed. The Home Secretary freed the three men from the house of correction. The Mendicity Society released a public statement declaring that it was not its intention to arrest people who were making a living on the streets and that it had instructed its officers to arrest only those who committed acts of vagrancy or begging as defined by law.[136] Political pressure from a wide cross-section of London society shored up the agency of the poor entertainers, upholding their physical and economic liberty.

The Agency of Police

The Mendicity Society sought to control how people used the streets and to define the types of activity that were allowable in public. The society's role was one of 'police'. By the early nineteenth century, the notion of police 'encompassed that series of political hopes and aspirations that many publicly minded commentators […] thought central to the maintenance and expansion of England's role in the world, and her peace at home'.[137] The Mendicity Society, like many commentators, believed that beggars threatened the prosperity and security of the metropolis. By removing disorderly nuisances from the streets, the charity hoped to promote London as an industrious and enlightened capital. The Mendicity Society's campaign against begging was part of a broader movement to bring order to the metropolis. Other philanthropic and governmental schemes

[136] The governors of the Mendicity Society claimed that its constables had not been acting under their instructions when they arrested the glee singers. However, it was not fair of the Mendicity officials to blame the constables for exceeding their remit, for Mendicity officials had expressly aimed to target street performers. Although the Mendicity Society reigned in its campaign against street entertainment in the wake of the glee singers case, there were further attempts to suppress street performance. See Brenda Assael, 'Music in the Air: Noise, Performers and the Contest over the Streets of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Metropolis', in *The Streets of London: From the Great Fire to the Great Stink,* ed. by Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore (London: Rivers Oram, 2003), pp. 183-97.

[137] Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 6. See also Jonas Hanway, *The Defects of Police the Cause of Immorality, and the Continual Robberies Committed, Particularly in and about the Metropolis* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775); [Patrick Colquhoun], *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis, Explaining the Various Crimes and Misdemeanours Which at Present Are Felt as a Pressure upon the Community,* 2nd edn (London: H. Fry, 1796).

targeted prostitution, property crime, and blood sports.[138] To advance the interests of police, the Mendicity Society engaged in polic*ing*.[139] The society had its own constables (or 'red liners' in pauper slang) who patrolled the streets for beggars, directing some to Red Lion Square for investigation and arresting others. As they were sworn in as special constables at the magistrates' courts, Mendicity officers had the legal power to apprehend beggars and vagrants.[140] However, as Mendicity constables policed public behaviour, their own public actions came under scrutiny. The charity's policing practices were as controversial as its views on almsgiving and work.

The poor frequently resisted Mendicity constables on the street. There were reports of beggars kicking, biting, and drawing weapons on Mendicity officers who attempted to arrest them. In 1821 it took three red liners to secure Dennis Hayes, such was his violence.[141] Beggars tended to establish their pitches on busy thoroughfares; this meant that large numbers of people frequently witnessed arrests. Mendicity officers could not count on the support of the crowd. Hackney coachmen refused to convey Mendicity constables and their prisoners to watch houses.[142] Passersby frequently subjected Mendicity constables to verbal and physical violence. *The Morning Chronicle* reported in 1819 that one thousand people (most likely an exaggeration) pelted Mendicity officers with stones and mud as they attempted to make an arrest.[143] Police reports often described crowds as 'mobs', suggesting it was primarily working-class people who assisted beggars. Yet, middle and upper-class people also remonstrated with officers, advised beggars to run away, and refused to assist the constables.[144] These collective displays of agency frequently resulted in beggars escaping from Mendicity officers.

The public seemed to have been particularly quick to come to the defence of people who appeared to be particularly vulnerable because of their age or disabilities. When a Mendicity constable apprehended Helen Sullivan, a woman cradling a baby, passersby implored him to 'Let the poor

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[138] See for example, Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830* (London: Longman, 1999); Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[139] For a discussion of begging and policing see John Wade, *A Treatise on the Police and Crimes of the Metropolis* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829), pp. 135-47.
[140] HCPP, Select Committee on Existing Laws Relating to Vagrants, 1821 (543), IV.121, p. 20.
[141] *The Morning Post*, 10 January 1821.
[142] Ibid; HCPP, Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, p. 91.
[143] *The Morning Chronicle*, 19 July 1819.
[144] *The Morning Post*, 6 March 1819; *The Morning Post*, 6 November 1828; *The Morning Post*, 4 March 1835; Montagu Burgoyne, p. 43.

creature go on, and don't hurt her, for the sake of the child'.[145] Sullivan's 'infant' turned out to be nothing but a bundle of rags. A fabrication designed perhaps to elicit sympathy from almsgivers may have served double-duty as a defence against arrest. Although female beggars outnumbered male beggars on the streets of London, press reports of Mendicity Society arrests feature many more men than women. One possible explanation for this disparity is that women were arrested less often than men were, perhaps because passersby intervened more frequently on their behalf.[146] The stereotype of the sturdy beggar was gendered as male. Female beggars—who often had young children with them—may have appeared more like pathetic objects of sympathy than confirmed beggars in need of punishment. In Sullivan's case, her deception seemed to justify the constable's actions; however, any suggestion of rough treatment was likely to raise the ire on onlookers.

It was common for poor people to accuse Mendicity constables of gratuitous violence. Charged with assaulting a Mendicity constable, William Hines alleged that the constable had struck him with his staff, to which had responded only in self-defence. Hines appealed to the court: 'you wouldn't blame me for that?'[147] He suggested that no self-respecting man —the judge included— would bear such an unprovoked attack on his body and dignity from a constable. Unconvinced by Hines' version of events, the judge sentenced him to prison. James Grant argued more convincingly that Mendicity constables had employed excessive force. He alleged that Mendicity officers, while attempting to arrest his family, had 'roughly handled' his wife and had hit him several times on the head, causing him to drop the infant he carried.[148] The incident not only prompted cries of 'shame' from passersby; it resulted in a successful prosecution of a Mendicity officer for assault and false imprisonment. Several middle-class Londoners testified on Grant's behalf and likely paid for his legal representation.[149]

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[145] *The Times*, 8 December 1836.
[146] An alternative explanation is that male beggars were more vocal in court than female beggars and so appeared more frequently in press reports. It is also possible that women's begging strategies were subtler than those of men and so less likely to attract constables' attention. Hitchcock, 'Begging on the Streets', pp. 489-90.
[147] *The Examiner*, 7 December 1834.
[148] *The Times*, 21 May 1825; *The Morning Chronicle*, 21 October 1825.
[149] As an unemployed tailor who sang ballads on the streets, James Grant was in no position to pay the prosecution costs himself. *The Morning Chronicle*, 21 October 1825.

Like the Mendicity constables, parish beadles and police officers encountered hostility on the streets. However, Mendicity officers reportedly faced the greatest opposition.[150] Despite the fact that Mendicity officers had legal powers to make arrests, their authority was not always recognised. Magistrate Harrison Codd believed that popular antagonism towards Mendicity constables arose from 'the consideration that the mendicity officers want that "tower of strength" which the police possess in "the Queen's name"'.[151] The plain-clothed agent of a private society commanded less respect than a uniformed policeman. Some people suspected that the Mendicity officers arrested innocent people solely so that they could claim monetary rewards for apprehending vagrants. In 1819 a beggar frustrated Mendicity constables' attempt to arrest him when he called out that the constables only wanted him for 'blood money' and so gathered a crowd to his aide.[152] *The Times* scandals had given the Mendicity Society a reputation for being underhanded and self-serving; suspicion of the charity's motives extended to its constables. The radical press argued that the society could not be trusted to perform a public policing role with fairness and impartiality. Referring to the glee singers case, a writer in *Paul Porcupine* asked '[w]hat right has this self-constituted society […] to send the squalid, "dungeon ruffians", whom it dubs "officers"' to make arrests.[153] By describing the Mendicity officers as 'police jackals', 'Dogberries', and '*mouchards*', radical writers portrayed them as incompetent and malicious.[154] Radicals alleged that Mendicity officers spied on the poor and persecuted them on their masters' bidding. The radical press suggested that victims were justified in resisting such an oppressive force.

Non-radical publications avoided inflammatory arguments that seemed to suggest that the Mendicity Society was as corrupt and tyrannous as the political establishment of the *Ancien Regime*. However, they did indicate that the Mendicity Society's policing was often cruel. The press frequently

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[150] HCPP, Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, p. 33.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Magistrates gave rewards for the apprehension of beggars until 1824, when the rewards were abolished. Significant numbers of people seemed to have believed that Mendicity constables were motivated by rewards, for in 1821 the society stated in a report 'that *the constables* […] *are not allowed to participate, or have any interest whatever, in the rewards given for the apprehension of vagrants*' and advised the public not to obstruct the constables. Although individual officers could not claim rewards, the Mendicity Society collected the rewards and incorporated them into its funds. *Third Report of the Society*, p. 10.
[153] There is very little information about who owned or wrote for *Paul Porcupine*. However, the publication was likely an imitator of William Cobbett's *The Porcupine*. *Paul Porcupine*, no. 1 [1836], p. 16.
[154] *The Sunday Times*, 2 April 1826; *The Morning Post*, 25 August 1826; *The Sunday Times*, 27 August 1826.

drew attention to discrepancies between the Mendicity Society's rhetoric and practice. While the charity claimed that most beggars were cunning tricksters, it often arrested people who did not appear to be so, including elderly people, people with disabilities, foreigners who appeared to have little comprehension of English laws and language, and children. Press reports were often sympathetic towards these individuals. In 1823 a Mendicity official alleged that Allan Johnson was a 'vile imposter' who pretended to be 106 years old, but was really only seventy-nine.[155] Magistrate Richard Birnie concluded that Johnson's tale was not wholly true because the old man could not recall the name of the Chief Colonel of the regiment in which he claimed to have served. *The Times*, however, disagreed with Birnie's judgment, insisting that soldiers frequently did not know their superior commanders, for they saw so little of them.[156] The newspaper suggested that the charity had been overzealous in prosecuting Johnson. Even if Johnson had exaggerated his age, at seventy-nine he was still an old man and deserving of sympathetic treatment.

As in the case of Allan Johnson, criticism was often directed equally at the Mendicity officers who made arrests and the magistrates who sent beggars to the house of correction. Like the Mendicity officers, magistrates frequently faced accusations that they overstepped the bounds of the law. Allan Laing was widely condemned for his part in the glee singers case. Although the three singers faced the same charges, Laing committed them to prison for different lengths of time, according to how 'impudent' they had been in court.[157] Commentators (radical and otherwise) argued that Laing had allowed his personal pique, and not justice, to dictate his decision. The vague Vagrancy Act allowed magistrates to bend the law to their own purposes.

If some magistrates used their powers to pass harsh sentences on beggars, others employed their discretion to dismiss the cases the Mendicity Society brought before them. Whether because they feared public condemnation in the press or because they themselves were sympathetic, the courts were

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[155] *The Times*, 2 May 1823.
[156] Ibid.
[157] James Evans was committed to the house of correction for two weeks, William Martin for three weeks, and James Hurd —whom Laing described as 'the most impudent of the lot'— for one month. Laing had a reputation for harshness. Allyson N. May, 'Fiction or "Faction"?: Literary Representations of the Early Nineteenth-Century Criminal Courtroom', in *Crime, Courtrooms and the Public Sphere in Britain, 1700-1850*, ed. by David Lemmings (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 167-92.

often lenient towards beggars who were foreign, disabled, or who were especially young or old. A Mendicity official reported in 1838 that the charity's officers had ceased apprehending blind beggars as magistrates so seldom committed them.[158] When the Mendicity Society accused elderly Richard Gibson of imposture, a clerk at the police court observed that 'there were many strong young fellows about the town begging with impunity; they were the persons who ought to be looked after, not men of seventy years of age.[159] The clerk suggested that it was right for the Mendicity Society to suppress sturdy beggars, but that the charity was wasting its efforts pursuing a harmless old man.

Not all magistrates were willing to apply the vagrancy laws to their fullest extent. In 1825 Mendicity officers appeared at Marlborough Street police office with 'Waterloo Tom', a woman who claimed to have served in the Napoleonic Wars disguised as a soldier. The officers reported that they had found her on a doorstep, shamming fits to excite the compassion of passersby. Waterloo Tom gave a different account of her actions. She stated that, after having walked into London from the country and drinking with a friend, she:

> was quite overcome, and obliged to sit down to rest on the steps of a door; when she fell asleep; but she neither begged nor intended to beg of any one; and, as a proof of that, she said she had a bundle of her husband's clothes which she was bringing up to him from the country[160]

Waterloo Tom had sophisticated knowledge of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. She did not deny that she had sat on the doorstep, but she did deny that she had stopped there with an intent to beg. The clothes proved that her reason for coming to London was honest. The magistrate was not unsympathetic. Alluding perhaps to her supposed soldiering career, he observed that 'she had some claim to indulgence that most persons, under such charges, had not'.[161] A Mendicity officer informed him that Waterloo Tom had been apprehended sixteen times for similar offences but, notwithstanding this, the magistrate let her go with only a warning.

The Mendicity Society aimed to promote police with its policing. However, critics argued that the Mendicity Society's constables abused their authority, subjecting vulnerable citizens to violent

[158] HCPP, Select Committee on Metropolis Police Offices, p. 94.
[159] *The Morning Post*, 15 December 1832.
[160] *The Morning Post*, 2 June 1825.
[161] Ibid.

treatment. They argued that Mendicity officials and their supporters did not act in the interests of the public good, but pursued their own vendettas, bending the laws to serve their purposes. Critics warned that the tyrannical Mendicity Society did not promote the order and the safety of citizens, but threatened their rights and freedoms. If the Mendicity Society were allowed to operate unchecked, London might become like Paris before the revolution, complete with its own *mouchards* and Bastille. Critics of the charity insisted that the Mendicity Society itself required policing. People on the streets, the press, and magistrates took it upon themselves to cast a critical eye over the society's policing activities. By doing so, they upheld the agency of beggars, often assisting them to escape punishment or ill-treatment at the hands of the Mendicity Society.

Conclusions

The Mendicity Society had the most radical vision of all the charities in this dissertation. It aspired to redefine the nature of charitable giving, to regulate economic activity in public spaces, and to eliminate begging, an issue that had concerned lawmakers for centuries. The charity believed that beggars exercised their agency in inappropriate ways. According to the Mendicity Society, mendicants chose to pursue the lucrative trade of begging and an idle life. The society argued that it would compel mendicants to direct their energies towards productive labour and to become economically independent. However, beggars conceived of their agency in very different ways to the Mendicity Society. They argued that the Mendicity Society was wrong to emphasise their free will. They maintained that they did not choose to beg, but that they were at the mercy of economic and personal circumstances that gave them little alternative means of survival. Poor people who engaged in street hawking and street performance countered the charity's claim that they were idle and unproductive, insisting that they were legitimately working for their own upkeep. Even when they presented themselves as agentless victims of circumstances, beggars exercised a degree of agency in challenging the Mendicity Society's rhetoric with a rhetoric of their own.

Together with radical commentators, the poor alleged that the Mendicity Society merely deepened their demoralisation and dependency. The charity's thin soup could not address the

economic problems that led people to turn to begging, its demeaning scientific methods compromised the self-respect of the poor, and its policing restricted plebeian economic opportunities. The poor expressed their agency not simply in terms of the economy of makeshifts. There was a decided political edge to their agency. To the people who attempted to make a living on the streets, the Mendicity Society was as much a threat to their rights and liberties as to their incomes.

The chapter on lying-in charities reveals how agency flows across and between classes. Agency could be exercised collectively, as well as individually. The collective aspects of agency are even more prominent in the case of the Mendicity Society, for this charity had the greatest public presence of all the charities in the dissertation. The Mendicity realised it could not achieve its goals alone, so appealed to members of the public, the press, parish authorities, and law officials to support its efforts. However, many members of London society —people as varied as Chartists, evangelical philanthropists, and authors— refused to accept the society's anti-almsgiving arguments and its conception of public spaces. Many commentators argued that the Mendicity Society, as a private organisation, was ill-qualified to perform a public policing role. The lack of consensus over Mendicity Society policies opened up opportunities for beggars to continue to use the streets and to defend their rights when facing arrest and prosecution.

7. Conclusion: Directions Forward for Agency

This dissertation employs the concept of agency to dissect the dynamics of plebeian power in the broad context of early nineteenth-century London charities. At the same time, it uses charity to test the potential applications of agency as a historical concept and as a tool for historical analysis. The introduction outlines the ways in which historians typically define agency: intentional action, resistance, the defence of rights and customs, autonomy, exerting control over one's own life, strategy, choice, and voice. This dissertation provides examples of each of these definitions. Some poor people resisted the advances of district visitors, fending them off with verbal and physical violence. Beggars argued that the Mendicity Society trampled on their rights and freedoms. Plebeian parents acted autonomously in pursuit of their own priorities when they chose to send their children to the local dame rather than to the 'whimsical' infant schools.[1] Pregnant women devised strategies for skirting the strict regulations of the lying-in charities, while plebeian mothers voiced their opposition to vaccination and to the 'unfeeling' medical men who punctured their infants' skin.

However, this dissertation pushes the boundaries of agency, expanding the concept beyond the (already extensive) definitions historians typically employ. It argues that agency can take the form of compliance as well as resistance. Agency can be exercised collectively as well as individually. It can involve emotional reactions and mental strategising alike. There might be as much agency in childish inarticulacy and innocence as in the voice and experience of adults. However, in broadening the scope of agency, does this dissertation render agency an ever vaguer concept? Has agency lost its precision and become 'a grab-bag concept that hovers around the notion that people do things', as John Robb fears?[2] Some scholars recommend dispensing with agency, arguing that the concept is too nebulous to be of use and is weighed down with unhelpful theoretical assumptions.[3] It is certainly possible to write about the power of subalterns without employing the term agency. Yet, what advantages do we forego by abandoning agency? This dissertation argues that agency can be a useful

[1] *Friendly Advice to My Poor Neighbours: In a Series of Cottage Tales and Dialogues* (London: C., J., G., & F. Rivington, 1829), p. 124.
[2] David Bruno, 'An Agency of Choice?', review of *Agency in Archaeology* (2000), ed. by Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, *Cambridge Archaeology Journal*, 11 (2001), 270-71 (p. 271).
[3] See for example Walter Johnson, 'On Agency', *Journal of Social History*, 37 (2003), 113-24.

concept if steps are taken to address its problematic aspects. The case studies in this dissertation illustrate what the concept of agency offers and demonstrate strategies for using agency constructively.

Multiple definitions of agency make the concept tricky to pin down. Each scholar characterises and locates agency in a different way, often rendering it difficult for scholars to engage in debate about it. A potential solution to the nebulousness of agency might be to rein agency in, to select one definition for agency and clearly define its scope. However, this would not be an easy task. It is unlikely that scholars would be able to reach a consensus about which of the current definitions of agency is most illuminative or best embodies the spirit of 'agency'. Moreover, since the boundaries between definitions of agency frequently overlap, isolating a single definition for agency would be difficult.

Even if it were possible to establish a concrete definition for agency, it might not be advisable to do so. By confining agency within set bounds, we may strip it of the very qualities that make it exciting and useful to historians. The multifaceted nature of agency might be seen as an advantage, rather than a disadvantage. Agency is an 'essentially contested' concept; there is no agreement about what the 'essence' of agency is.[4] As shown in the introduction to this dissertation, the character of agency has evolved over time. In the early nineteenth century, agency marked an instrumental relationship in which one thing (or person) acts through another. In more recent times, successive generations of historians have advanced new characterisations of agency. E.P. Thompson saw agency in terms of collective political resistance, while more recent portrayals tend to focus on the agency of autonomous 'everyday' actions or the agency of nonhumans, drawing on Actor-Network Theory. Each turn in historical fashion has given rise to a corresponding flavour of agency. The value of an essentially contested concept lies in its ability to generate debate and discussion. The open-endedness of agency enables historians to be creative, to consider the dynamics of power from multiple angles. Agency allows for subtle interpretations. It is less useful when it acts as a byword for a single behaviour and more illuminating when it is allowed to be flexible.

[4] W.B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56 (1955-56), 167-98.

Historians have a habit of using agency without defining it, as if there were general agreement about what the concept means. The contested nature of agency does not give historians free rein to dispense with theoretical considerations. Agency is not a 'bridge to get "beyond" theory'.[5] Indeed, the contested nature of agency —its tendency to follow historiographical and theoretical trends— means it is particularly important for historians to engage with theoretical debates. The problem in not defining agency explicitly is that historians' vision of agency may appear to be uncontested, as *the* fixed and unchanging definition of agency. The theoretical assumptions that underpin agency are obscured when the concept is not defined. Historians must state explicitly what it is they consider to be agency and how they measure it. They must situate themselves within the historiographical development of agency, highlighting how their political, personal, and historiographical concerns inform their portrayal of agency. Histories are unavoidably informed by present concerns; historians are products of their own historical age and this shapes how they interpret and frame the past. Although it is possible to write histories without employing the term agency, the concept nevertheless often lurks beneath the surface. Modern preconceptions may be inescapable, but historians should be aware of and upfront about these preconceptions.

Modern historians value their capacity to exert control over their own lives, to act autonomously, and to resist authority and so they may wish to portray the 'underdogs' of history as people who experienced a similar sense of power. While empathy can be useful for historians to exercise, it can also invite anachronism. As Andy Wood, Hillary Taylor, and Walter Johnson warn, historians may be so personally invested in recovering agency that they place too little emphasis on the structures that checked subalterns' power or (consciously or unconsciously) vest them only with an agency that they personally value.[6] There are, however, ways of mitigating the problems of empathy. To address the imbalance of agency/structure, this dissertation takes Andy Wood's suggestion and includes 'darker, more pessimistic' accounts alongside tales of agency.[7] It tells of

[5] Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb, 'Agency in Archaeology: Paradigm or Platitude', in *Agency in Archaeology*, ed. by Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 3-17 (p. 3).
[6] Andy Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity and the Limits of Popular Agency in a Yorkshire Valley c. 1596-1615', *Past & Present*, 193 (2006), 41-72; Hillary Taylor, '"Branded on the Tongue": Rethinking Plebeian Inarticulacy in Early Modern England', *Radical History Review*, 121 (2015), 91-105; Johnson, 'On Agency'.
[7] Wood, 'Subordination, Solidarity', p. 72.

pregnant women who selected a midwifery service that best met their needs, but also relates the stories of lying-in outpatients who gave birth alone because they were unable to secure assistance from overworked midwives and of desperate women who —denied admittance into lying-in hospitals— delivered their babies on doorsteps. This dissertation suggests that the majority of plebeian mothers were able to choose variolation if they desired it, yet this was not the case for the women whose infants were surreptitiously vaccinated during the 'pious fraud' at the Small Pox Hospital. Moreover, the choices of the poor were often severely limited. Some plebeian parents may have removed their children from infant schools because they were dissatisfied, while others may have had little alternative but to do the same, because they were unable to pay outstanding school fees or because their unstable financial situation meant that they seldom remained in one location for long. Studies that address both agency and structure may not be triumphant or neat in their conclusions and they may not appeal to the modern love for the underdog, but they are ultimately more balanced. There is a modern tendency to believe than an individual's determination and cunning can overcome any barrier —that one can achieve anything if only one believes in oneself and works hard enough. Balanced histories see historical actors as subject to, as well as subjects in, the historical context in which they live.

It is not possible for historians to escape entirely the influence that their own culture holds over them. However, by being conscious of their own historically specific outlook, they may be able to identify agency outside their own experience. This dissertation shows that historical actors may have conceived of and exercised their agency in ways that are alien to modern historians. There is agency beyond the autonomous, secular, and individualist twenty-first century notion of the concept. This dissertation historicises agency, considers it within its cultural context, rather than taking it to be a universal human condition. This study allows a detailed examination of the evidence to suggest a model of agency; it does not make the evidence fit within a preconceived model of agency. It seeks to examine all source material, not ignoring material that clashes with modern conceptions of agency. This dissertation argues that agency need not take the form of individual autonomy or resistance. People can exercise agency in choosing to comply with the demands placed upon them. Some plebeian women gained satisfaction in following and in enforcing the standards of lying-in hospitals.

Early nineteenth-century philanthropists wrote extensively about infant missionaries and poor people who embraced district visiting. It is easy to dismiss such writing as cloying and naïve. Historians tend to prefer their paupers to be saucy and rebellious, not moralising and compliant. Some see little agency in religion, for how is a divine being who has a plan for each human life compatible with the idea that people exert control over their own lives? However, while philanthropists' accounts of conversions may not correspond exactly to lived experiences, they may nevertheless reflect an aspect of plebeian agency. This dissertation argues that there may be agency in the instrumental sense of being an agent of God's will. For example, some poor men and women found spiritual comfort and an outlet for their energy in serving as agents of district visiting.

This dissertation also argues that agency need not involve strategy or rational deliberation, as many historians assume it must. The chapter on vaccine charities shows that emotional reactions can embody agency, enabling historical actors to safeguard their own interests and express their dissatisfaction. Interrogating agency also encourages a reconsideration of *who* is capable of agency. The infant schools case study indicates that agency is not solely the preserve of adults with extensive life experience. Although they did not engage in organised acts of resistance or defend their rights, infant truants nevertheless exercised agency by privileging their desire for unsupervised fun above educationalists' wish that they remain within the structured environment of the infant school. The example of the infant missionaries suggests that —according to educationalists' representations at least— childish inarticulacy and innocence could be powerful forces.

This dissertation challenges depictions of plebeian agency that emphasise the 'shared consciousness' of working people.[8] Agency is a 'dynamic and relational concept' that moved across ever-shifting configurations of power.[9] This dissertation reveals, and reminds scholars, that 'the poor' were not a homogeneous entity, united against the rich. The charities in this dissertation interacted with people in a range of economic situations, from the most destitute beggars to individuals who were nearly middle class. There was further variability in the religious beliefs, familiar structure,

[8] Ibid., p. 29.
[9] Anne Montenach and Deborah Simonton, 'Introduction: Gender, Agency and Economy: Shaping the Eighteenth-Century European Town', in *Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640-1830*, ed. by Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-15 (pp. 4-5).

aspirations, and characters of charity beneficiaries. These variables ensured that poor people did not express their agency in uniform ways. Indeed, in many cases, the behaviour of poor people was polarised. Mothers from artisanal families often paid to send their children to the infant schools, but the poorest parents could not see the value in doing so. While some lying-in hospital patients followed medical orders, enjoying a restful confinement, others smuggled in gin when the nurses' backs were turned. Plebeians might even exercise their agency against one another. Far from being a sisterhood united by the shared experience of childbirth, plebeian women in lying-in hospitals snitched on one another. Many midwives of outpatient charities extorted money from their patients or neglected them, despite the fact that both midwives and charity patients hailed from the same class. Infant missionaries frequently disobeyed their parents. Narratives of heroic resistance and class cohesiveness may be uplifting, but historians should not be so wedded to these narratives that they ignore uncomfortable truths. There were multiple plebeian agenc*ies* rather than a single plebeian agency. That there were multiple agencies opens up new dynamics to rethink the broader history of philanthropy and poor relief.

Perhaps the only thing that was common to all poor people was that —to a greater or lesser extent— they were in straightened financial circumstances. Histories of plebeian agency often focus on how the poor secured the means of survival. This dissertation examines the links between the economy of makeshifts and agency. Plebeian parents strove to secure schooling that offered their family flexibility in the short term and that would equip their children to navigate a complex and highly literate city as adult workers in the future. Poor people claimed that the Mendicity Society's thin soup and backbreaking work programme were inadequate to address the economic circumstances that drove them to beg.

However, Sarah Lloyd argues that the poor were not simply 'objects in search of objects'.[10] Jonathan White takes issue with some examinations of agency and making shift that portray the poor as 'savvy consumers' who 'pursue non-market goods in the forms of charity and public relief with a

[10] Sarah Lloyd, '"Agents in Their Own Concerns?": Charity and the Economy of Makeshifts in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *The Poor in England 1700-1850: An Economy of Makeshifts*, ed. by Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 100-36 (p. 130).

strategic rigour that would cheer the heart of any economist'.[11] Historians risk stereotyping the poor as obsessive consumers who, like the fictional Spitalfields family, are interested only in extracting material goods from philanthropists. This dissertation illustrates that the poor were not only attuned to the amount and quality of relief that charities distributed, but the spirit in which it was distributed. Charity was as much about rights, obligations, and respect as it was about survival. Indeed, this dissertation details multiple instances in which the poor chose *not* to consume charity. Poor individuals hid when district visitors came calling in the hope of avoiding their intrusive and patronising attentions. Many beggars refused to go to the Mendicity Office at Red Lion Square, alleging that the charity's investigations were demeaning. Moreover, this dissertation reveals that the poor exercised their agency to protect and promote a range of interests beyond material wealth, including their health, souls, rights and freedoms, privacy, and respectability. Plebeians did not have one-track minds, but were complex individuals with sophisticated sets of motivations. Future studies might re-examine the nature of the fields, such as politics and religion, in which people exercised their agency. Rather than treat each of these fields as self-contained, historians might emphasise how these fields intersected and infused one another.

This dissertation not only examines how the poor exercised agency, but also how philanthropists conceptualised the agency of the poor. Although agency had a different set of meanings in the early nineteenth century than it does today, commentators in the early nineteenth century nevertheless discussed the same phenomena that historians today label as agency. Reverend Stone and the Mendicity Society viewed the poor as strategic and manipulative, yet ultimately lacking in industriousness and economic independence. Influenced by evangelical and Swedenborgian beliefs, the founders of infant schools and district visiting societies believed that the poor should be agents in their own spiritual and moral development and could serve as missionary agents. The medical men of vaccine charities characterised plebeian mothers as irrational and emotional creatures with the potential to be dangerous agents of rumour and infection. Future investigations may reveal how

[11] Jonathan White, 'A World of Goods?: The "Consumption Turn" and Eighteenth-Century British History', *Cultural and Social History*, 3 (2006), 93-104 (p. 99).

agency was conceived of and exercised in other social relationships, as in the relationship between master and servant or clergyman and parishioner.

How did charity beneficiaries conceive of their agency? Answering this question is difficult, for there are few sources on early nineteenth-century charity that were produced by the poor. Some insights can be gleaned from reports of the behaviour of the poor. Samuel Wilderspin claimed that plebeian mothers informed him that they would remove their children from his school and place them in dame schools, suggesting that these women were well aware of their capacity for choice and were not shy about expressing their opinions. In some cases, the voices of the poor speak more loudly from the archives. Newspapers reported that many beggars who were arrested by Mendicity officers emphasised their powerlessness, claiming that difficult economic circumstances forced them to beg. It is difficult to interpret such sources, for the poor likely felt a pressure to present their agency in a certain light. Yet, even if sources do not reveal precisely how the poor conceived of their agency, they do suggest that the poor knew how to represent their agency strategically. Pregnant women who appeared at the doors of the lying-in hospital in labour hoped that their appearance of vulnerability might gain them admittance. Plebeian parents may have secured concessions from vaccine charities and infant schools by threatening to go elsewhere if their demands were not met. Philanthropists' representations of agency did not necessarily correspond to agency as the poor experienced it, although most representations contained an element of truth.

Philanthropists approved of some forms of plebeian agency, while other forms troubled them deeply. They were eager for the poor to act independently to secure their own income or to seek out God, but much less enthusiastic when the poor exercised their independence by rejecting their values and beliefs. For example, district visitors encouraged the poor to hold their own Bible meetings, but were aghast when plebeians endorsed the teachings of radical deists. This dissertation examines how philanthropists attempted to shape the agency of the poor, directing it into channels that they deemed appropriate, and it assesses the success of their attempts. To prevent patients from acquiring dependent habits, the governors of lying-in hospitals tried to limit the length of patients' stay on the wards. However, by capitalising on the unpredictable timing of childbirth, many women remained in hospital long past the recommended period. The medical men of some vaccine charities sought to

restrict plebeian parents' immunisation choices, denying them access to variolation or compelling them to vaccinate. Yet, these measures were not successful, for private practitioners continued to offer variolation and concerns about parental rights forced the abandonment of many compulsive measures. Educationalists carefully designed infant school environments to encourage children to practice good behaviour. However, many children used school spaces 'against the grain' or avoided them altogether, taking to the streets instead. The founders of district visiting societies anticipated that surveillance and 'friendly' instruction would stimulate self-sufficiency and propel the poor to take an active interest in Christianity. Yet, many plebeians undermined visitors' efforts by obstructing or deceiving them. The Mendicity Society aimed to eradicate dependent and fraudulent practices among the poor. Widespread criticism of its punitive measures and anti-almsgiving campaign, however, compromised its ability to target certain behaviours. The success of attempts to shape plebeian agency varied, depending on a range of factors. Philanthropists made the greatest headway when they worked with the grain of plebeian expectations and were willing to adapt, in some measure, to the priorities of the poor. Where philanthropists' plans tapped into a culture that was shared between poor and rich, they were likely to prove fruitful.

The primary focus of this dissertation is to identify and examine agency in its wide variety of forms, rather than to measure the impacts of plebeian agency. Nevertheless, this dissertation reveals that the poor shaped the nature of the institutions with which they interacted. Eager to prevent plebeian mothers from seeking immunisation elsewhere, vaccine charities met many of mothers' 'emotional' requests and adopted measures to reduce the fear, anxiety, and suspicion of plebeian parents and their infants. The infant school educationalist Samuel Wilderspin compromised his anti-corporal punishment stance to deal with the persistent problem of truancy. Poor people were so resistant to visitation that many district visiting societies devised new measures to reach them. With its lectures and outdoor preaching, the Christian Instruction Society left the domestic sphere and established itself in public spaces. In 1836 three glee singers protested against their arrest at the hands of Mendicity officers. The controversy sparked by their case forced the Mendicity Society to abandon its campaign against street performers. Plebeian agency rarely revolutionised charities overnight. As Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker suggest, small acts of plebeian agency (often in pursuit of

short-term goals) combined to exert pressure on institutions.[12] Change occurred slowly, as institutions responded to plebeian actions. Frequently, institutions attempted to suppress a certain behaviour, only to discover that the poor devised an alternative strategy, which they were then forced to address. Change frequently took the form of an alms race between charity beneficiaries and charity governors. The unintended consequences of plebeian agency often had greater impact than intended consequences.

The founders of 'novel' philanthropic projects in the early nineteenth century proclaimed that they had discovered solutions to longstanding problems. The Mendicity Society argued that its system of investigation and discrimination would eradicate begging, a problem that had troubled lawmakers for centuries. However, none of the charities examined in this dissertation were able to completely control plebeian agency. Throughout the Victorian period, charities continued to struggle to contain expressions of plebeian agency that they considered troublesome and encourage 'good' forms of agency. The district visiting societies of the early nineteenth century were succeeded by a number of different visiting charities, including the London City Mission and Bible missions, which encountered similarly challenging behaviours from the poor as their forerunners had.[13] Stone's concerns about dependency were not resolved during his lifetime, as demonstrated by the enduring nature of his arguments. The tale of the Spitalfields family was still circulating as late as the 1890s.[14] Victorian ventures to regulate charities and prevent 'abuse' and dependency, like the Charity Organisation Society (est. 1869), harnessed the tale to promote their efforts.[15]

In fact, there are parallels between agency in the early nineteenth century and agency in the twenty-first. Many plebeian parents in late Georgian London carefully considered their children's educational options, mirroring modern-day parents who ponder the respective merits of state schools,

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[12] Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, *London Lives: Poverty, Crime and the Making of a Modern City, 1690-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[13] See Martin Hewitt, 'The Travails of Domestic Visiting: Manchester, 1830-70', *Historical Research,* 71 (1998), 196-227; Donald M. Lewis, *Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986).
[14] James Hole, *Lectures on Social Science and the Organization of Labor* (London: John Chapman, 1851), p. 161; *The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, January 1853, p. 66-69; [Helen Dendy] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor* (London: Macmillan: 1896), pp. 140-41.
[15] *The Charity Organisation Reporter*, 27 April 1882.

academies, and homeschooling and who compete to secure places in the best schools. Medical authorities today are concerned that growing numbers of parents believe —and propagate— distressing stories about the supposed harmful effects of vaccination. Like plebeian mothers in early nineteenth century London, many modern parents decline immunisations, with potentially devastating impacts on public health. As was the case in Reverend Stone's era, commentators today debate how to wean the poor off handouts and encourage them to work for their keep. So-called 'welfare dependency' and 'benefit cheats' are not new phenomena.

Agency is an immensely flexible concept that is not of unique concern to historians of the long eighteenth century. Agency is employed widely across the field of history. Indeed, as shown in the introduction to this dissertation, agency is as popular (and problematic) among archaeologists, anthropologists, and sociologists as it is among historians. Many of the themes that this study identifies in early nineteenth-century charity may appear in other contexts: in parish relief and slavery, in crime and women's rights. As shown above, there is a measure of continuity in how agency was conceived and exercised in the Georgian and Victorian periods, and even in how agency is conceived and exercised today. However, there are differences as well as similarities across contexts. By attending closely to the subtleties of early nineteenth-century London, and the sources left from the period, this dissertation demonstrates that agency works in diverse ways. Although the nature of agency varies from context to context, the concept of agency is a powerful tool for dissecting subtle dynamics of power.

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